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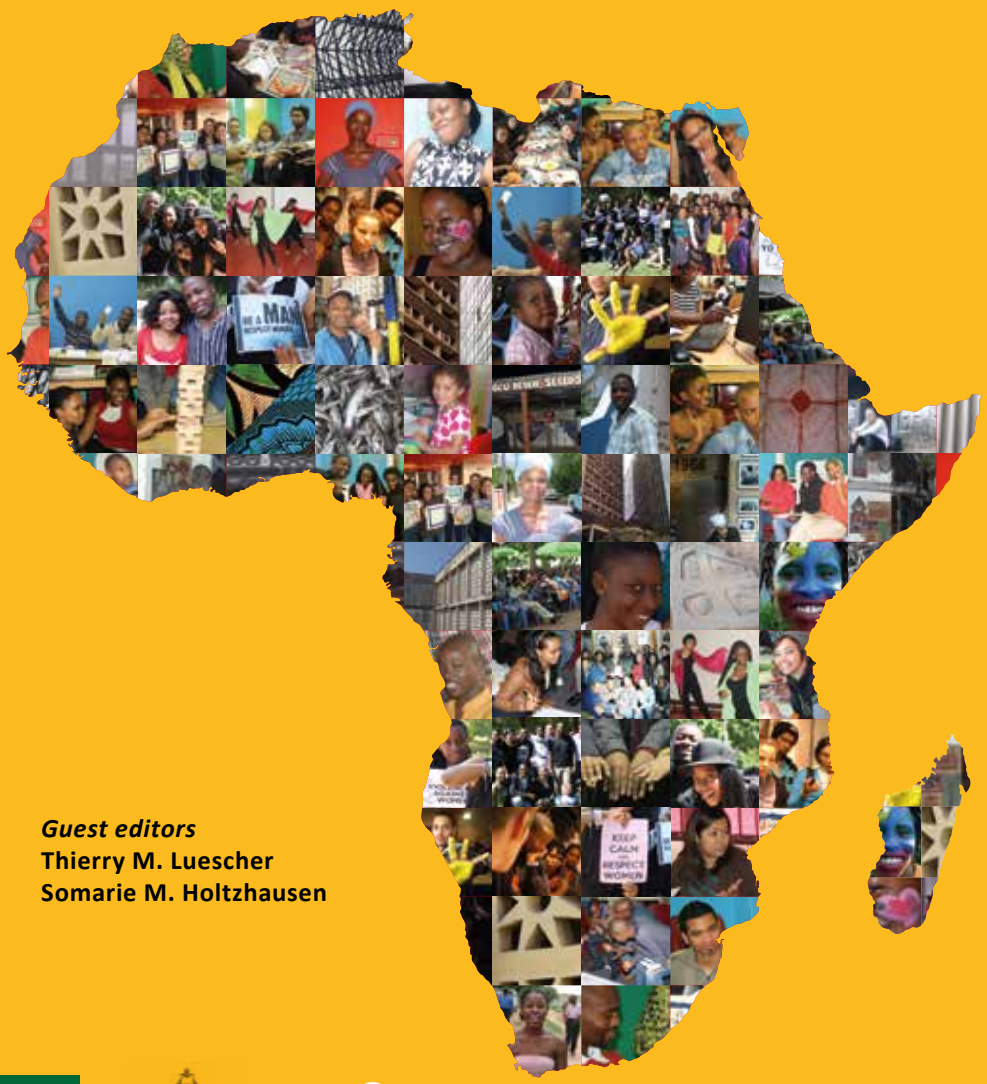
Engaged and student-centred universities



Guest editors
Thierry M. Luescher
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AFRICAN MINDS

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Journal of Student Affairs in Africa

The *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa (JSAA)* is an independent, peer-reviewed, multi-disciplinary, open-access academic journal that publishes scholarly research and ref lective discussions about the theory and practice of student affairs in Africa.

Vision and mission

The *JSAA* aims to contribute to the professionalisation of student affairs in African higher education by publishing high-quality scholarly articles, research and ref lective discussions by academics, professionals, researchers and students about student affairs and services in African higher education.

The *JSAA* strives to be the foremost academic journal dealing with the theory and practice of the student affairs domain in universities on the African continent, and an indispensable resource for national policymakers, the executive leadership of universities and colleges dealing with student affairs, deans of students and other senior student affairs professionals, as well as institutional researchers and academics and students focused on the field of higher education studies and student affairs.

Focus and scope

The *JSAA* considers theoretical, practice-relevant and ref lective contributions from across the scholarly field of student affairs and professional domains of student development/student affairs, taking due cognisance that the scope is broad, f luid and context-dependent.

The scope of *JSAA* is indicated by keywords such as: student affairs, student career development, student counselling, student development theory and research, student discipline, student engagement, student experience, student finances and financial aid, student housing, disability/disabled students, student leadership and governance, student life cycle, student living and learning, student movement, student organisations, student orientation, student policy, student politics and activism, student sport, student support, academic development (and its intersection with the student affairs co-curriculum), graduate attributes, and teaching and learning support. This list of keywords is not exhaustive. Our key focus area is the core functions of student affairs and services in Africa.

Submissions are encouraged from scholars and ref lective practitioners from across the globe. Submissions must be original and relevant to the mission, scope and focus of the journal. Especially encouraged are submissions from African scholars and professionals working in higher education on the African continent. Submissions dealing with student affairs issues from other contexts (e.g. the African diaspora; other emerging economies; developed countries) that are transferable to the African context are also considered for publication. Submissions must be made on the *JSAA* online submission website. Please register, log in and submit your manuscript at: https://upjournals.up.ac. za/index.php/jsaa. For any queries and to contact the editors please email Ms Bronwin Sebonka at bronwin.sebonka@up.ac.za.

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Editorial team

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EDITORIAL

Towards community-engaged, student-centred universities

Teboho Moja[1] & Birgit Schreiber[2]

The last decade has witnessed increasing calls for universities to dispose of their 'ivory tower' reputations and engage more with the communities that surround them, and for them to be relevant and attuned to the lived realities and inclusive of all involved. There is also a growing scholarship that attempts to generate and share knowledge on what it means to be a community-engaged university and to be student-centred. Community engagement and student-centredness are built on shared principles of relevance, inclusion, and relatedness. Cherrington et al. (2019) and McKenna (2013) argue that true engagement requires constant dialogue, reflection, intentionality, and commitment by all parties involved. Malm et al. (2013) also make a case for more faculty involvement in community engagement including teaching courses on community engagement.

The imperative for universities to be community-engaged is not isolated from global challenges and translates into engaging with these issues, including the conflicts in the Middle East, coup d'états in some African countries, wars in Azerbaijan and Ukraine, threats of war in Kosovo/Serbia and Guyana/Venezuela, or the war games in the South China Sea. It is through community engagement and student-centred principles that learning becomes relevant and meaningful – and references real events and lived experiences.

The articles in this issue and editorial comments underscore the importance of addressing pressing issues – global and local – within the framework of community engagement and student-centred practice. We need to encourage our students to become global citizens who are not only informed but also actively engaged in efforts to promote peace, justice, and stability in their communities.

Wright (2011) provides examples of instances where university teachers across the academic and professional spectrum are moving more towards student-centred teaching, learning, support, and development. Likewise, the articles featured in JSAA 11(2) present strategies and cases for universities in becoming student-centred, community-engaged, relevant, and inclusive, with some using the African philosophy of ubuntu as an analytical lens for understanding inclusive, interdependent relations in learning environments. The issue thus emphasises the idea that when students and

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staff live and learn in relation to a community, to each other and to pedagogy and the academic material, this is part of a larger thrust for a shared humanity. This shared humanity, humanity to others, or 'I am what I am because of who we all are' is what ubuntu promotes.

The principles of ubuntu, akin to community engagement and student-centredness, are indeed relevant at local level. They are also relevant in relation to the geo-political hostilities we are currently experiencing across the globe.

Finally, on behalf of the JSAA Editorial Executive, we would like to thank Dr Martin Mandew for his decade-long service to the Journal as one of the founding editors. Dr Mandew is retiring at the end of 2023 from his position at the University of the Free State and he has requested to be reassigned to the International Editorial Advisory Board of JSAA.

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GUEST EDITORIAL

Transdisciplinarity and ubuntu ethics as principles for responsive, engaged, and student-centred African universities

Thierry M. Luescher[1] & Somarie M. Holtzhausen[2]

The idea that responsive, engaged, and student-centred African universities must aspire and contribute to the development of critical human capabilities and sustainable socio-economic development within their locales and beyond is reflective of a broader philosophy in higher education and student affairs that demands a more dynamic and transformative role of universities as critical social institutions in societies (Keet & Muthwa, 2021; Luescher et al., 2023). Examples of African universities that practise various kinds of community engagement as integral parts of their functioning illustrate the extent to which they can realize that aspiration and become inseparably connected to the emancipatory, decolonial and indigenization agenda of African higher education as a "powerful transformative force" (Goddard, 2018; Fongwa et al., 2022).

Across the wide range of its domains, student affairs in Africa has the potential to contribute to the broad transformative purpose of African universities by:

- collaborating with external, community-based partners (e.g. through community service and service learning, volunteering programmes, providing public information, academic advising and publicly accessible career centres, and partnering with local residents and businesses in the provision of residential and other services), and;
- developing students' transformative capabilities through co-curricular skills development training, extra-curricular offerings and support for student-run activities, and other interventions, to help them navigate a complex and interconnected campus, and world, with strong values and a well-rounded and adaptable, transferable skill set.

Addressing real-world challenges requires responsive universities that are principled in their engagement to effectively contribute solutions to multifaceted problems. In addition to the guiding principles of transformation,[3] we want to suggest here that a principled approach to engagement must involve *transdisciplinarity* and a consideration and commitment to a relevant *African ethic* and *philosophy of education* in their

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3 Key transformation principles elaborated in South African higher education policy include academic freedom and autonomy, accountability, democratisation, effectiveness and efficiency, equity, development, and quality (cf. Luescher et al., 2023).

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research, teaching and learning, community engagement and impact beyond the university.

Knowledge(s) of transformation and transdisciplinarity

Transformation requires a diversity of relevant knowledges; knowledges of transformation and for transformation (Lange, 2014). By embracing transdisciplinarity, African universities acknowledge the importance and validity of multiple relevant knowledges. This includes Africa's many knowledge libraries (Zeleza, 2021), that go beyond codified academic and professional knowledge, on transformation in the university, the local environment and multiple communities, and broader society. Knowledge relevant for transformation within and outside the university does not only reside among disciplinary experts and professionals but also with non-academic stakeholders (e.g. community members, community-based and non-governmental organisations, local craftspersons and businesses, policymakers, local authorities and government). To address real-world problems, a holistic understanding is required that incorporates global and local, universal and particular, abstract and grounded knowledges and perspectives.

An ethical approach to engagement between academic and non-academic communities is another dimension of a principled approach. Responsive and engaged African universities can play a vital role in addressing the pressing issues of our time, from economic, social, and political problems of poverty and inequality, weak governance and political instability, conflict and human rights violations, healthcare challenges, migration and displacement, to climate change and environment-friendly transitions. For instance, student affairs professionals in the Global South in general, and Africa in particular, are leading in conceptualising and integrating a student affairs response to the Sustainable Development Goals (Schreiber et al., 2023). Yet, in order to have the moral standing to be invited to conversations seeking to address such issues, and be seen as legitimate actors to even create and facilitate platforms for such conversations, explicit commitments to shared rules of engagement must be made and adhered to, and humility and reverence between members of different (knowledge-) communities must be maintained and reciprocated.

Ubuntu ethics and an African philosophy of education

The recognition and incorporation of an African philosophy of education (Waghid, 2004), particularly centred on communalism and humanism, is part of an emerging ethical approach to education and engagement in Africa. In the South African, and increasingly also in the broader African context, the philosophy of ubuntu is fast gaining traction as a touchstone of a relevant indigenous African ethics (Ramose, 2021; Chemhuru, 2016; Higgs, 2011). Respect, responsiveness and relational engagement are qualities that are fundamental to ubuntu ethics, which emphasise the interconnectedness of all human beings within the human community, as implied in the assertion that *umntu ngumntu ngabantu* – 'a person is a person through people'. Ubuntu fundamentally involves an ethic that one's humanity is inextricably bound to the humanity and well-being of others, thus promoting a sense of shared responsibility and cooperation. It also translates into a holistic understanding of education that goes beyond individual achievement.

The call for responsive and engaged African universities thus coincides with a shift towards an ubuntu ethics as African philosophy of education and reflects a growing awareness of the importance of culturally-relevant and context-specific relational approaches to learning. By centering education on communal values and relational humanism, African higher education institutions seek to become more rooted within the cultural values operative in African communities. This also resonates with the call that higher education in 21st-century Africa must break with inherited colonial Eurocentric knowledge structures and organisation, decolonise its knowledge libraries, institutional cultures, and ways of operating, and re-orientate itself boldly towards the cultural, socio-political and economic realities and aspirations of Africa, and particularly African youth and students.

The meanings of student-centredness

Student-centredness offers a third principle in the re-orientation of the core functions of African universities towards becoming responsive and engaged – with particular respect to curricular and co-curricular teaching, learning and skills development, community engagement, and the holistic development and concern for the well-being and education of all students. While student-centredness has some grounding in education models (Blackie et al., 2010), the concept is not deeply conceptualised in African universities even though it is increasingly used in planning and policy documents (Xulu-Gama et al., 2018). Its evocation in relation to student affairs and services internationally also remains rather shallow to date and rarely goes beyond assertions that student affairs should be tailored to "meet the personal needs, demands, and expectations of an increasingly diverse and complex student population" (Rubly, 2017, p. 4).

Referencing Amartya Sen's work (1999), we argue here that student-centredness is fundamentally about realizing student freedoms. Student-centred higher education and student affairs must focus attention on developing the navigational capacities and capabilities that students value and will need to successfully navigate personal transitions and life stages, their transitions into the world of work and development of sustainable livelihoods, and their emerging place as critically constructive and active community members and citizens.

At the 2021 Universities South Africa (USAf) conference (2021, p. 73), Luthando Jack argued that

> *student-centredness cannot be insulated from the role of higher education in a society like South Africa, a continent like Africa, and a world so unequal. [It] cannot be divorced from the purposes of higher education, particularly in a changing society.*

Furthermore, students today came from very diverse backgrounds, and "universities' systems, processes and orientation were not in sync with today's student". Student-centredness rather is about knowing the students, "partnership between students and the university"; "co-learning and the recognition of cultural assets", including students' "aspirational, social, familial and navigational capitals"; and "instead of disorientation, there ought to be continuity between the lives students live with their families and communities, and their lives in the university" (Jack in USAf 2021, p. 73)

Luthando Jack's argument has wide-ranging implications for universities and student affairs in Africa, for the role of higher education in society, its orientation and organisation, and institutional cultures, and even the way universities are run. For instance, the proposition that student-centredness involves a partnership between students with their university asserts students' right to participate in decision-making and co-determine the learning processes, relationships, and living arrangements that affect them; they must be part of co-creating new structures, processes, and practices that affect their learning (Luescher-Mamashela, 2013; Ashwin & Mcvitty, 2015).

Thus, student-centredness has implications for the conception of what constitutes learning environments and what are appropriate methods of teaching and learning; the place of students in decisions about the university and about their living and learning; and the recognition of diversity, the need for equity, and support for different ablenesses in the student body (Holtzhausen & Wahl, 2022). It will have implications for the manner and kinds of programmes, interventions, and services offered by student affairs and services (Rubly, 2017); and it will require reorientation in the way student affairs and academic development staff are developed (Blackie et al., 2010).

The acknowledgement and embrace of an African philosophy of education, particularly centred on communalism and humanism (ubuntu), signals a positive shift towards a more culturally relevant and socially conscious approach to higher education in Africa. This transformation has the potential to shape the future of education on the continent, fostering a sense of community, interconnectedness, and shared responsibility among students, educators, and communities. It is therefore not unexpected that responsiveness through community engagement is regarded as fundamental for the transformation and decolonisation of higher education. Some scholars (Mugabi, 2014; Raditloaneng 2013; Saidi 2023) even propose that the notion of community engagement as a 'third mission' of universities needs to be revisited in the context of Africa as the main priority or mission. Understanding how these complex demands involved in notions of engagement and student-centredness interact with the leadership and management of universities, student affairs, and student development and success is yet another crucial conversation to be had in higher education and student affairs in Africa.

We suggest here that the notion of responsive, engaged and student-centred African universities creates the opportunity for re-orientating transformation and decolonisation initiatives towards student-needs and community-needs, and thus adopting and adapting relevant interventions and experiences. This conversation is crucial for advancing higher education in Africa and preparing students for the challenges of the 21st century.

Towards responsive, engaged and student-centred African universities

This guest-edited issue of the *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa* (JSAA) originates in conversations during the build-up to the National Higher Education Conference entitled 'The Engaged University', which was organised by USAf in partnership with the South African Council on Higher Education and held from 6 to 8 October 2021 (USAf, 2022). The special JSAA issue was originally proposed jointly by Dr Bernadette Johnson (USAf and University of the Witwatersrand) and Dr Amani Saidi (Council on Higher Education).

Eventually, support for the special issue moved under the auspices of USAf and its Higher Education Leadership and Management (HELM) programme, and to the responsibility of Dr Oliver Seale, Prof. André Keet, and Dr Johnson, who asked Prof. Thierry Luescher and Dr Somarie Holtzhausen to act as guest editors of the issue.

In response to the JSAA call for papers published in 2022, almost 20 abstract proposals were received. After a ten-month process of drafting, two rounds of editorial vetting and commenting, revisions, a double-blind peer review process, and a final set of revisions, this special issue publishes eight articles directly submitted for the special issue as well as an on-campus report about HELM's Student Affairs and Student Success programme. As always, these articles are augmented by others from the open submission process and scholarly contributions, including two book reviews and two editorials.

The original call for papers invited articles to focus on theory development and practice-relevant knowledge of student affairs in Africa in relation to a diversity of issues: student-centredness and student-centred environments and practices; community engagement, volunteering and community-orientated student groups; student engagement; student associations and student affairs practices promoting care; student health and well-being; care for first-year students; ubuntu philosophy or capability; and student transitions and graduate support. In an astounding way, most of these topics are reflected in this issue's articles and in a way that we are sure will generate much thinking, debate and further research in the sector.

Ubuntu in the practices of African graduates and students

A strong theme in this issue's articles relates to learning relationships among students, relationships between graduates and wider society, and the conception of these relations in terms of ubuntu. With the article '"Giving back is typical African culture": Narratives of giveback from young African graduates', the research team led by Alude Mahali-Bhengu at the Human Sciences Research Council makes a critical intervention in our understanding of African graduates' social consciousness and the kinds of interventions that foster commitments to transformative leadership, community engagement, and giving back to society even after students have left university. Drawing on a wide dataset from across several African countries, they show how African graduates' practices of giving back to family, community, and society, change over time, and how their conceptions of give-back are evidence of a strong sense of ubuntu.

Mikateko Mathebula and Carmen Martinez-Vargas place ubuntu front and centre in their conception of a capabilities-based framework for assessing the performance of higher education in terms of supporting student well-being. Analysing data from two longitudinal research projects with undergraduate students in South African universities, they infer that ubuntu underpins the ways students tend to relate to each other – as interdependent partners of a learning community – while at university. Considering the deeply relational ways of being of African students at university, Mathebula and Martinez-Vargas advocate for embracing an African indigenous worldview and the creation of conditions for students to be able to achieve the capability of ubuntu.

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The articles by Mahali et al. and Mathebula and Martinez-Vargas strongly relate to each other: the former shows the results of deliberately fostering an ethic of give-back and transformative leadership among students and the latter, articulating ubuntu as capability, illustrates how students ways of relating on a daily basis already evidence an ubuntu ethic. These two articles are followed by a third in which an ubuntu ethic is evident. Dumile Gumede and Maureen Sibiya analyse the self-care practices of first-year students in managing stressors during the COVID-19 pandemic. They use digital storytelling as data collection method. Their findings show that first-year students engaged in a range of self-care practices across all the six domains of self-care whereby relational self-care was the most fundamental domain that underpinned first-year students' well-being. They therefore recommend a student affairs self-care programme design to prevent harm and support adequate self-care which should include social involvement and relational engagement as fundamental principles.

Technology and support for enhanced student engagement and success

Following the special COVID-19 issue of JSAA in 2021, the experience of the pandemic continues to inspire research that gives new insights into students' adaptation and resilience to fast changes in the culture of teaching and learning and the place of technologically enhanced teaching and learning in African universities. Sonja Loots, Francois Strydom and Hanlé Posthumus have analysed a large set of qualitative data from the South African Survey of Student Engagement collected during the pandemic. They explore factors that support student learning and development and how these factors may be translated to enhance student engagement in blended learning spaces. Loots and her colleagues find that relational engagement (between students and their peers, students and lecturers, students and support staff and administrative staff, and even students and the learning content) is central to the student learning experience. Learning technologies may enhance relational engagement if these platforms are used to create blended learning environments that support learning and development.

Extended curriculum programmes (ECP) predate the pandemic and its ramifications on students' lives. Such programmes were developed to provide promising, yet underprepared students with the necessary foundations to achieve success in higher education. The question of how students in extended curriculum programmes can be better supported continues to concern student affairs practitioners like Lamese Chetty and Brigitta Kepkey. Their article explores students' interest in, awareness and utilisation of support services offered as part of an extended curriculum programme in health sciences. Their analysis of survey and qualitative responses of the first-year students showed that students were not as well informed as they should be, and that they accessed support services related to administrative, academic, and psychological/emotional or support needs much more frequently than those services related to other health needs or security services. It also showed that there remained a stigma around access to and use of certain support services.

The article by Rishen Roopchund and Naadhira Seedat illustrates how a voluntary student organisation can promote student well-being and engagement, student-

centredness and student development. Their study focuses on a department-based chemical engineering student association and its relationships with departmental staff members and other university departments (such as community engagement) in organising a range of student development and community engagement activities. The authors propose an action plan for the association's future improvement and growth, which can serve as a template for other initiatives of this nature.

Equipping students for successful transitions into livelihoods

The article by Taurai Hungwe and colleagues, 'Diaries of establishing an entrepreneurship incubator at a health sciences university', recounts a range of challenges and experiences they documented in the process of establishing an entrepreneurship incubator to support student entrepreneurial development at a health sciences university in South Africa. They describe and critically reflect on matters such as the funding, staffing, planning and operation of the incubation centre during its inception and building phase, and they consider the critical milestones they have reached and offer recommendations to others interested in embarking on such a journey.

Entrepreneurship skills are often mentioned as increasingly important for students to navigate the current complex world of work and develop sustainable livelihoods. Nowhere is this more evident than in the article by Andrea Juan and her research colleagues. 'Graduate transitions in Africa: Understanding strategies of livelihood generation for universities to better support students' shows that the notion of a straightforward transition from university into full-time employment is not the typical experience of African university graduates. Indeed, Juan and her colleagues found that such a path is accessible to only a minority of African graduates. For the majority, their post-graduation livelihood pathways are multidimensional and complex, involving any combination of paid employment and unpaid work (such as internships or home care-giving), entrepreneurship ventures, further studies, and unemployment. They show how important it is for African universities to help graduates navigate the challenges of post-graduation income generation and diversification by developing key transferable skills and resources early, including entrepreneurship skills, and affording graduates continued access to career development support and other transition services on campus.

Chanaaz Charmain January's contribution deals with the role of student affairs in the transformation of higher education and student success. Against her development of a framework for higher education transformation that blends equity and excellence, January discusses how student affairs can best contribute to student success. In a mini-case study, she discusses successful collaborations in the student residence sector at the University of Cape Town. She also shows how the transformation framework may cascade down to a diverse set of graduate attributes called 'Student Learning Imperatives'.

Innovative methods in student affairs research

Our introductory comments on this issue of JSAA would not be complete without noting the methodological diversity that can be observed in the published articles. Research on student affairs in Africa is becoming characterised by the use of diverse

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and innovative research methodologies! In this issue, they include digital storytelling, auto-ethnographic diarizing and reflexivity, multi-year student cohort interviewing, and longitudinal multi-country graduate tracer studies, to mention but a few.

There are also huge differences in scale and unit of analysis in the research projects: there are reflective practitioner studies of the activities of a single student organisation within a university and there are surveys and qualitative studies involving dozens of universities and NGO partners across the African continent, as well as in North and Central America, Europe and the Middle East. Finally, while some studies are predominantly theoretical in nature, others are decidedly empirical, including the reflective practitioner accounts that are specifically meant to describe and critically reflect on a particular student affairs practice or intervention.

With these brief comments and reflections, we hope to have made this issue more accessible and focused some attention to the many ways it contributes to the development of more responsive, engaged and student-centred African universities.

The guest-editors
Thierry M. Luescher and Somarie M. Holtzhausen

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

"Giving back is typical African culture": Narratives of give-back from young African graduates

"Ukubuyisela kuyisiko lase Afrika elijwayelekile": Izindaba zokubuyisana kwabafundi abasebasha base-Afrika

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ABSTRACT

This article presents a collection of narrative examples on how a cohort of African graduates, who are beneficiaries of a scholarship from a global foundation, understand and practice giving back. The scholarship programme aims to cultivate and support a network of like-minded young leaders who are committed to giving back by providing training and mentorship that reinforces the core values of transformative leadership and a commitment to improving the lives of others. To investigate these ideas, the Human Sciences Research Council is tracking recent graduates of the scholarship programme using a longitudinal cohort study design consisting of a tracer study, annual qualitative interviews with scholarship alumni, and smaller collaborative enquiries. Beginning in 2019 and tracking alumni for a five-year period, the study involves alumni from seven study sites. Findings from the study show that alumni exhibit a strong sense of social consciousness including an alignment of their understanding and practices of give-back with deeply embedded African notions of give-back as a 'ripple effect', reciprocity and ubuntu. Alumni acknowledged that there was not only one way to give, indicating that they participated in give-back in relation to their capacity, usually beginning with contributions to the family. As they became more established in their careers, their sphere of give-back increased with their reach expanding to the broader community. A low proportion of alumni felt that they were making an impact on an institutional or systemic level. Findings also show the impactful position that university partners hold in fostering give-back engagement among students and their potential role in supporting alumni after graduation. The article argues that nurturing social consciousness in young people and an understanding of give-back as collective movement building can contribute to solving development and social justice problems in Africa.

KEYWORDS

Give-back, African graduates, transformative leadership, social consciousness, ubuntu, scholarships, social responsibility, higher education

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IQOQA

Lo mbhalo wethula iqoqo lezibonelo ezilandisayo zokuthi iqeqebana labafundi base-Afrika abaneziqu abahlomule ngomfundaze ovelele, ovela kuSisekelo Somhlaba, baqonde futhi bazijwayeze kanjani ukubuyisela. Uhlelo lomfundaze luhlose ukuhlakulela nokweseka inethiwekhi yabaholi abasebasha abanomqondo ofanayo abazibophezele ekubuyiseleni ngokunikeza ukuqeqeshwa nokwelulekwa okuqinisa izilinganiso ezibalulekile zobuholi obuguqukayo nokuzibophezela ekwenzeni ngcono izimpilo zabanye abantu, ukuze iphenywe le mibono. Umkhandlu Wokucwaninga Ngesayensi Yabantu ulandelela abasanda kuthola iziqu ohlelweni lomfundazwe usebenzisa ubuchwepheshe bocwaningo lweqembu lesikhathi eside luhlanganisa ucwaningo lokuthola izingxoxo ezinohlonze zaminyaka yonke nababefunde ngazo kanye nemibuzo emincane yokusebenzisana. Kusukela ngo-2019 kanye nokulandela umkhondo we-alumni isikhathi seminyaka emihlanu, lolu cwaningo lubandakanya abafundi bakudala abavela ezindaweni eziyisikhombisa zocwaningo. Okutholakele kubonisa iqoqo elibonisa umuzwa oqinile wokuqaphela umphakathi okuhlanganisa ukuqondanisa phakathi kwendlela ababekuqonda ngayo nokwenza ukubuyisela ngemibono ejulile yase Ningizumu-Afrika yokubuyisela 'njengomphumela ozwakalayo', ukubuyisana kanye nobuntu. Ebakade bengabafundi bavumile ukuthi ayikho indlela eyodwa yokunikela, okukhombisa ukuthi babambe iqhaza ekubuyiseleni ngokwesikhundla sabo, ngokujwayelekile baqala ngokunikela emndenini. Kodwa-ke, njengoba beqala ukuqina emisebenzini yabo, izinga labo lokubuyisela liyenyuka futhi ukufinyelela kwabo kakhulu emphakathini obanzi. Ingxenye ephansi yabakade bengabafundi bezwa sengathi benza umthelela ezingeni lesikhungo noma lesistimu. Okutholakele futhi kukhombisa isikhundla esinomthelela ababambisene nabo basenyuvesi ekukhuthazeni ukusebenzelana kokubuyisela phakathi kwabafundi kanye nendima yabo engaba khona ekusekeleni ama-alumni ngemva kokuphothula iziqu. Leli phepha ligomela ukuthi ukukhulisa ukuqonda komphakathi kanye nokuqonda okukhulayo kokubuyisela njengokwakha ukunyakaza okuhlangene kuyadingeka ukuze kuxazululwe izinkinga zentuthuko kanye nobulungiswa bezenhlalakahle e-Afrika.

AMAGAMA ANGUKHIYE

Ukubuyisela, abaphothulile e-Afrika, imfundo ephakeme, isibopho emphakathini, ubuholi obuguqukayo, ukuqaphela komphakathi, ubuntu

Introduction

This article presents a collection of narrative examples on how a cohort of African graduates, who are beneficiaries of a prominent scholarship from a global foundation, understand and practice giving back. Beneficiaries are recruited on the basis of financial need, academic talent and by exhibiting leadership traits and a commitment to giving back. These are usually individuals already engaged in community leadership activities (Bono et al., 2010). The scholarship programme aims to cultivate and support a network of like-minded young leaders by providing training and mentorship that reinforces the core values of transformative leadership and a commitment to improving the lives of others. The Human Sciences Research Council is undergoing a longitudinal cohort study comprising an Alumni Tracer Study (ATS) and a qualitative study, which includes annual interviews with scholarship alumni, to investigate these ideas. The study involves alumni from Kenya, Ethiopia, South Africa, Rwanda, Uganda, Ghana and the African diaspora (those who studied off-continent and now reside outside of the African continent).[1] In addition, key informant interviews (KIIs) have been conducted with implementing

1 We use 'scholars' to refer to students currently being funded by the scholarship programme. We use 'alumni' to refer to recent graduates of the scholarship programme.

partners of the scholarship programme (these are 25 university and NGO partners in North America, Central America, Europe and Africa).

The ATS is a longitudinal panel study designed to survey the scholarship programme alumni who received their scholarships through 25 implementing institutions. Given the relatively small population of tertiary alumni,[2] all of them were included in the study with a view to draw out a representative sample which could then be weighted to the expected population (839 out of a possible 1,161). The population of secondary alumni[3] was 8,650, of whom a sample of 1,000 was expected. A randomised stratification sampling process was undertaken with oversampling to allow for attrition in subsequent waves of the study. In the qualitative sample, a total of 122 participants from the countries listed above were recruited and interviewed annually.

Using these mixed-method research activities, recent graduates of the scholarship programme are being tracked longitudinally for five years, beginning in 2019. It is a study concerned with understanding success in ethical and transformative leadership, and how this is affected by context and education. The overall objective is to provide evidence at multiple levels on beneficiary pathways and the contributions they are making to their families, schools/institutions, communities, organisations, and societies, including the ways in which their give-back is mediated by individual, structural, contextual and programmatic factors.

The Foundation understands 'give-back' as a long-term non-linear practice, in line with a globalized economy in which people are increasingly mobile and in which social norms are in flux. While this understanding enables adaptability, there are a number of problems with the approach: alumni give-back is unstructured, informal, and is often not undertaken on a collective basis. Alumni give-back initiatives are not being monitored, measured, evaluated, nor brought into contact with one another and so a sustainable ethos of giving back is not necessarily being inculcated. Alumni are also struggling to engage in give-back that extends beyond the individual and community level and reaches a systemic level.

If the goal is to cultivate a network of young people committed to giving back and to continue to support their efforts then programme design and inputs must be instructive in fostering this ethos and facilitate opportunities for scholars to reflect on these inputs. There is also a need to pay greater attention to how the scholars' existing experiences and cultural understandings of give-back may be developed during their time in the scholarship programme in order to produce a cohort of scholars who will continue to engage in give-back even after their time in university has come to an end. Cultivating transformative leaders committed to giving back cannot be assumed, but must be thoughtfully and purposefully instilled, nurtured and supported. Universities have a role to play here, not just as sites of teaching and learning but as spaces where young people are conscientized by interaction with peers and community. Globally,

2 Tertiary alumni received scholarships from the Foundation to pursue undergraduate or postgraduate qualifications.

3 Secondary alumni received scholarships from the Foundation to complete secondary school.

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the purpose of universities has been expanding beyond their traditional mandate of teaching, learning and knowledge production. This stems from the expectation that universities should pursue engaged scholarship and work with the communities within which they are located to address socio-economic challenges. Community engagement is what Dube and Hendricks (2023) refer to as the "third mission", while Fongwa (2023) calls it the "third function" of universities. Engaged universities (i.e. those fulfilling their third mission or function) encourage "civil and social responsibilities amongst students and enhance their sense of attachment and belonging to the community" by providing opportunities and resources for community engagement and giving back (Dube & Hendricks, 2023, p. 134). Although acknowledged as a third mission of university, community engagement as a pillar remains largely neglected in African universities but the scholarship programme under discussion consciously weaves this mission into their programming. In this light, this article presents a case study of the efforts made by a cohort of young graduates to move beyond self-interest and become agents of social, economic and political transformation in their contexts, arguing that these young people embody a strong 'social consciousness'. A term we use to encompass both give-back and transformative leadership. Findings from the ongoing research are shared to support our claims. We also make a case for how support for these transformative efforts can be better inculcated during time at university by providing example narratives from university partner institutions.

Understanding social consciousness: Give-back and transformative leadership

Giving back can be understood as "voluntary activities contributed to one's own ... community" (Weng & Lee, 2015, p. 511). Giving back is closely related to the concept of philanthropy, which may be defined as concerned with "the social relations of care expressed in a diversity of forms and acts of giving through which individuals or groups transcend their self-interest to meet the expressed or recognised needs of others" (Schervish & Havens, 1998, p. 600). So, for example, an alumnus in Rwanda said: "my wish is to not work on my own interests but thinking about the broader people" (Jacques, 31, Rwanda, Personal interview, 2022).[4] Giving back may also be understood in the context of volunteering, which has been described as a more formalised way of producing a public good (Wilson, 2000). It may also be understood as a form of socially responsible activism, which, according to Jones (2002, p. 3), "involves many individuals taking actions in their everyday lives to help bring about what they see as a more socially and environmentally responsible world". Meanwhile, Andreoni (1990, 2006) proposes a "warm glow theory" for why people freely give to others who are lacking, suggesting that giving back is found in spaces where moral and cultural capital is acquired through solidarity, reciprocity, compassion and care for others.

4 The label used here denotes the study participant's pseudonym, followed by their age, their country of citizenship and the year the interview was conducted.

These qualities align with the core principles of give-back embedded in many African beliefs and cultures characterised by the concept of ubuntu. This notion of give-back as an ethics of reciprocation, has been understood, articulated and practised by alumni over the years:

> *I am privileged in many ways compared to my folks in Ethiopia … since I have more resources and better education, better connections, better opportunities, it isn't voluntary but mandatory for somebody like me to support people who are less fortunate ... (Habtamu, 26, Ethiopia, Personal interview, 2020)*

Africa contributes to global notions of philanthropy through the African social philosophy of ubuntu, which is a way of being and a code of ethics (Aina & Moyo, 2013; Wilkinson-Maposa, 2016). Ubuntu reflects African people's understanding of the essence of being human, a humanity that is reflected in collective personhood and collective morality (Ngunjiri, 2016). Or as an alumnus in Rwanda said:

> *People have been made by others and supported by others. Without other people you can't be like who you are today. You have to give back to the community. That's my spirit. (Jaeden, 32, Rwanda, Personal interview, 2022)*

Chuwa (2012, p. 150) reiterates this principle by suggesting that "a human person can neither be defined nor survive if separated from the society and the cosmos that enables that person's existence. It is a matter of justice to care for other humans, other lives and the non-living part of the cosmos".

At the same time, 'social consciousness' refers to the extent to which individuals and groups are aware of and concerned about social issues and the impacts these have on society (Freire, 1970; Goldberg, 2009). It is an awareness of the problems and challenges faced by different social groups and entails a commitment to working towards a more just and equitable society. Social consciousness can manifest in various forms, such as activism, volunteering, donating to social causes, and advocating for social justice. It also involves understanding and acknowledging the historical, cultural and systemic factors that contribute to social inequalities. Individuals who are socially conscious are typically aware of social issues, such as poverty, inequality and discrimination, and are committed to working towards social justice and positive change.

Closely linked is transformative leadership which aims at change in political, social and economic spheres in order to bring about social justice (Shields, 2010). In that sense, it has a moral aim that distinguishes it from other conceptions of leadership. In other words, transformative leadership is not content with changing the lives of individuals without also unearthing, problematising and dismantling the structures of power and privilege that prevent equity and freedom (Odora Hoppers, 2014; Shields, 2010) and that necessitate change or help in the first place. The concept of social consciousness encompasses the aims of the scholarship programme which selects potential scholars based on their experience of, and potential for, changing the world around them. Accordingly, emerging narratives of African give-back, as demonstrated by many alumni in the cohort, are about a progressively confident and well-informed assertion of

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Africans' capabilities to not only give but to also address root causes of social injustice on the continent (Kaya & Seleti, 2013). In this context, a present priority is to strengthen those capabilities, both during the university degree and after graduation.

Findings

Understanding alumni give-back

There is no one way to give back, "the possibilities are as diverse as the personalities, settings, and disciplines involved" (Chen & Hamilton, 2015, p. 8). As the years have progressed, a distinction can be drawn between 'informal' and 'formal' give-back. Informal give-back is characterised by small, responsive, usually once-off or single outcome driven actions, from which the immediate community benefits (i.e. family, friends, church, etc). Informal give-back can take the form of mentorship, career guidance, information sharing, tutoring, helping others adapt to university life, skills sharing and providing advice. It is often difficult to quantify the impacts of such informal arrangements and some alumni are reluctant to even call it giving back:

> *I haven't been involved much in give back projects ... But the little that I do, I have a group of young people that I mentor … provide guidance to them. If they need information, academic related, personal life, anything they just get in touch with me … I wouldn't really call that a give back project. (Bianca, 30, Ghana, Personal interview, 2022)*

Formal giveback is characterised by collaboration at an individual or institutional level; some kind of funding or material support; a documented plan/programme and sustained action. The number of alumni giving back in informal ways was greater than the number of those giving back in formal ways. Swartz makes a case that both these efforts should be lauded and that "the difference lies in the structured nature of these activities" (Swartz, 2021, p. 415). In other words, in Africa where resources are scarce, opportunities for structured or more formal arrangements "may not be as feasible as they are for those in the Global North" (Swartz, 2021, p. 415). Still alumni participate in give-back in their capacity and that usually begins with contributions to their immediate community. It was found that, over time, alumni expanded the social sphere in which they were giving back, moving from helping the nuclear/extended family, to engagement in broader community networks:

> *I have been helping at least four students, I've been paying their school fees, it's part of the give back activities in the county Mombasa … it's not that expensive but their parents cannot afford that. (Charlotte, 29, Kenya, Personal interview, 2022)*

In 2020, the ATS asked alumni about the kind of help they give to their communities (see Figure 1). For secondary alumni, volunteering (71%), mentoring (29%) and giving time (19%) were the top interventions. Meanwhile among tertiary alumni, mentoring (62%), volunteering (57%) and offering skills or expertise (41%) were the highest.

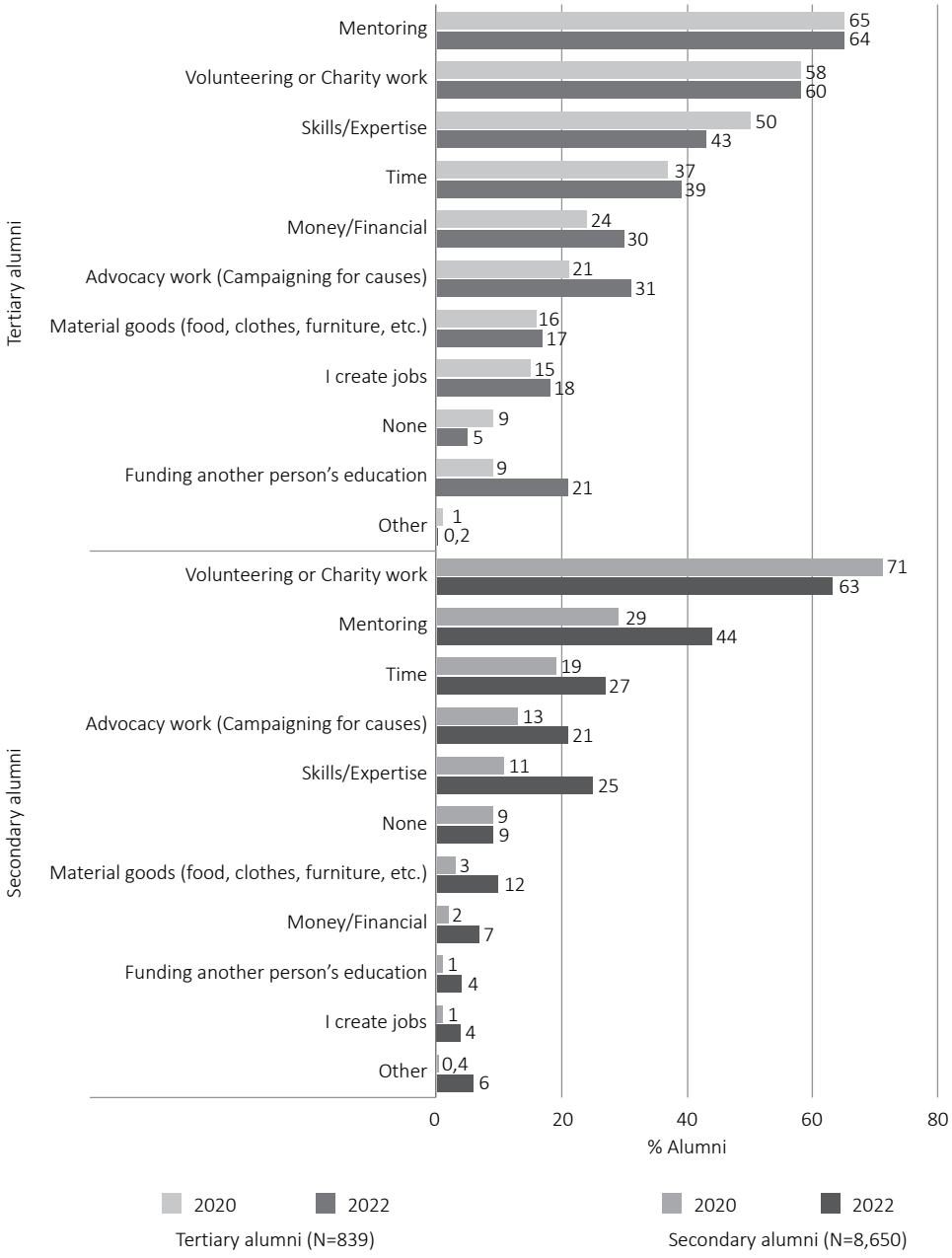

Figure 1: Types of help alumni reported giving to the community (% alumni)

Source: Wave 1, and 3 data from the ATS consolidated dataset (Juan et al., 2023)

In 2022 financial and material contributions increased for both secondary and tertiary alumni, with funding another person's education doubling in number for tertiary alumni. Half the alumni interviewed reported some form of sustained give-back since the study's

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inception and an ongoing commitment to giving back. These are young people who graduated as recently as 2020 or as far back as 2015 with more than a third (35%) of this cohort currently enrolled in postgraduate education. This ongoing commitment is reflective of most alumni's intentions and vision for give-back, with the vast majority (89% secondary alumni and 78% tertiary alumni) of those who participated in the 2020 ATS reporting that they would give back in the future. What is it that drives and keeps these givers dedicated to the charge?

What motivates alumni to give back?

Those who give back might be motivated by a strong social conscience. Moscovici defines social conscience as the state of being fully aware of the problems that affect others and striving to mitigate these (1998). In the 2020 ATS, 97% of secondary alumni and 99% of tertiary alumni said they were aware of social problems in the community that needed to be addressed. We found that scholars and alumni's drive to give back was shaped by an innate ubuntu ethics, their social conscious, time in the scholarship programme, their personal obligations to their families and broader communities, their education, and less pointedly, a belief in social justice.

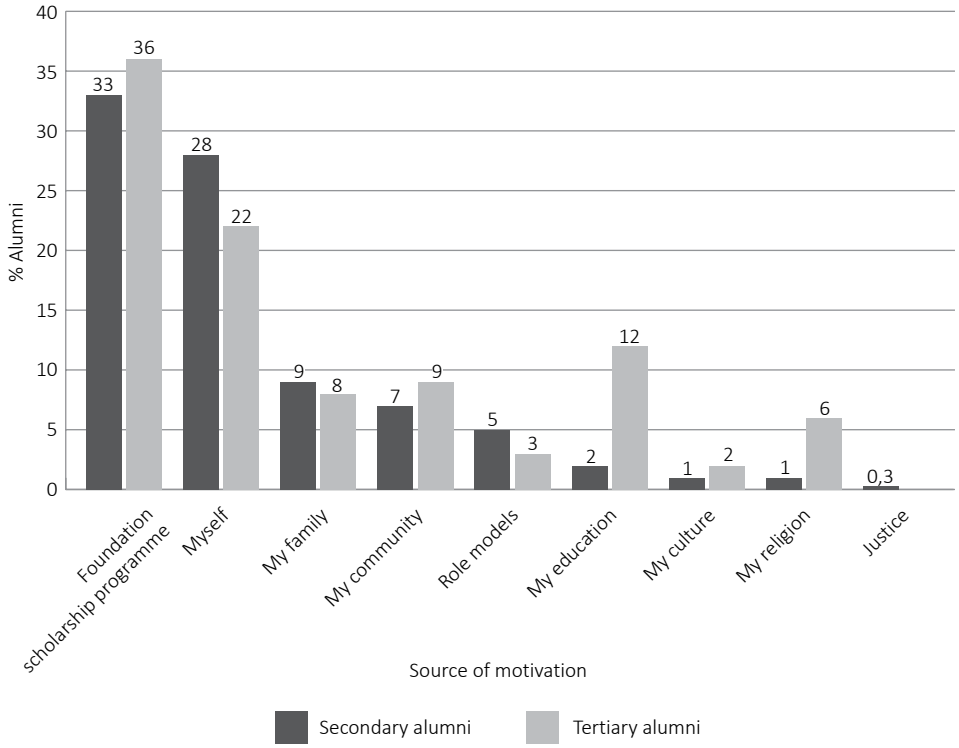

Figure 2: Source of alumni's drive to help the family and/or community (% alumni) (Secondary alumni, N=8,650; Tertiary alumni, N=839)

Source: Wave 3 data from the ATS consolidated dataset (Juan et al., 2023)

In the 2022 ATS, critically none of the secondary alumni and only 3% of the tertiary alumni named justice as a motivation for giving back. When key partners at universities were asked why justice seemed to rank so low as a motivation, they were generally unable to answer, since this value rarely featured in their give-back or transformative leadership inputs – which may be viewed as a missed opportunity during a fecund time in a student's life. The study also found that many alumni developed their passion for giving back over the course of their time at university, and through their interaction with inspiring peers. It is by working with one another, that scholars might strengthen their "capacity to recognize and analyze the systems and structures of a moving environment" and to conjure up ideas on how they might overcome these (Swartz, 2021, p. 398).

Give-back matures over time

By 2022, it was found that many alumni's understanding of give-back had matured, often through a process of trial and error. For example, Lizette from Uganda transformed a blog which she had initially established as a forum addressing gender inequality into a mentorship platform for young girls once she realized that the site had generated only a relatively limited impact in its original form. Lizette's transformation of the site was, in large part, inspired by an appreciation of the importance of collective action:

> *I know there are a lot of scholars who can be good mentors, so I'm thinking of riding on the peer mentorship model. (Lizette, 28, Uganda, Personal interview, 2022)*

In starting alone, alumni are better able to course-correct from learnings and failures to develop their ideas to address systemic problems. But it is in working with others, that the extent of their impact can fully be realized.

Where in 2020 alumni lamented the lack of robust collaborative networks to better support their give-back activities and aspirations, in 2021 many began to work more collaboratively in their projects, with half aiming to undertake give-back projects at an institutional/systemic level in the future. It was found that over time, alumni had become more proactive in their give-back efforts, working within their personal ecosystems to bring about change. Accordingly, by 2022, it was useful to ask how alumni's give-back initiatives had been established. In most instances, projects began in partnership with classmates or peers, but seldom alone.

> *It started with a group of four of my classmates and we said we should go back to our schools to talk to these young people … Two are fellow [scholarship programme beneficiaries], two are not [fellow scholarship programme beneficiaries]. (Clarence, 27, Diaspora, Personal interview, 2022)*

If collaboration and developing the ability to work with others forms an essential foundation for working towards addressing social injustice, then what can be done to support this capacity?

In 2021 alumni spoke more intentionally about framing their plans to give back around their studies, career or their entrepreneurial aspirations. By 2022, a number of alumni made little to no distinction between their job, business, education and give-back

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efforts – choosing instead to view their livelihood or study as their contribution in the world. Given that one of the barriers to giving back encountered by alumni is work and other pressures, one way of encouraging activity in a more sustainable way would be to promote closer alignment between giving back and the work, business and educational activities already being undertaken by alumni. That way someone like Ezra from Uganda, who says, "ever since I left university, the kind of work that I've been doing has been so demanding, so the kind of give-back that we used to have in university has not been possible" (Ezra, 26, Uganda, Personal interview, 2022), would be able to think more instructively about the impact he can make within the confines of his demanding job.

Samantha articulates this point reflectively:

> *I have been trying within what I have been exposed to, for example, the research [in my field] ... If I invest in that over time, that is a give back because the research comes up and says okay, we have these problems in [my field] … Then, that goes to the councils, they put in policies or whatever. That's also a form of giving back. I don't necessarily have to go to a soup kitchen every Saturday to be giving back. Sometimes, it has to be a more systemic thing. (Samantha, 26, South Africa, Personal interview, 2022)*

In 2022, most of the alumni engaged in community, NGO or charity work said that their involvement was aimed at changing communities; a much smaller proportion said the aim was to produce change among individuals. An even smaller proportion – only 3% of secondary alumni and 11% of tertiary alumni – said they were aiming to produce systemic change. Although there was relatively little focus on systemic change, the data should be seen in the context of an overall increase in levels of social consciousness and give-back activity among the tertiary alumni. Those alumni who had managed to give back at the institutional/systemic level did so through their work. For example, Sahar from Uganda described the change she had implemented by shouldering additional responsibilities:

> *… the eastern region of Uganda, it's more of like a patriarchal kind of setting. And like they don't believe women can do a lot of things and all that … But then I stepped up [at work], like people trusted me and voted for me … to be the women leadership council president … This is something that was not part of my contract but it's something I did voluntarily. And so I went ahead with my team and had to come up with a proposal or what I think can be changed … I wrote a proposal which required around 50 000 USD per year … like a number of things that we could be able to change, to make sure that we create like a gender considerate environment. And I presented to the steering committee and they approved our budget and approved the council. So it's up and running … So this budget is now an annual recurring budget and there are a lot of these things we changed, like the leave policies, the maternity, and a lot of other things like that affecting women. So a lot of these things, policies were written. And they were approved and I'm happy that they are putting them into practice … And I'm happy that at least I created that change and people appreciated it and it has actually helped them. (Sahar, 27, Uganda, Personal interview, 2022)*

Sahar studied Human Resources and they also works in the field. Their education coupled with work experience led to a heightened level of consciousness and expertise about a focused area. Individuals cannot care deeply and act effectively on every social and ecological problem they come across, but they can identify problems they feel are both important and which they have the agency and capacity to address effectively (Kotchoubey, 2018). Alumni rightly acknowledge that individuals, communities, institutions and systems are connected and that it is difficult to make a leap towards confronting systems without first addressing the issues that feel more proximal. Still insights from both interviews with alumni and university partners reveal the role partners play in fostering give-back engagement during scholarship, and their potential in aiding a network of active changemakers after graduation.

Nurturing social consciousness

Both the Foundation and university partners offer dedicated programming focused on developing scholars' capacities and dispositions as empathetic leaders with a sense of social consciousness. Partner data align with the findings discussed above, specifically that immediate community-based give-back features hugely in scholars' efforts, and that scholars are motivated and take charge of give-back interventions wherever possible.

> *[W]e really tried to instill that [the giving back concept overall] is a continuous process … it is not about waiting until you have completed your degree but finding ways to constantly give of your knowledge, impart what you have learnt, the skills that you are carrying now ... (Institution Q, South Africa, Personal interview, 2020)*

Scholars are being encouraged to play a more active role in the give-back interventions they undertake while part of the programme, and to see give-back as an opportunity to develop critical skills, networks and understanding of meaningful service to others. Some universities have used innovative ways to instil a culture of volunteering or community service, whether through requiring students to engage in a minimum number of service hours annually or certifying volunteer activities to give credit to students who undertake them. These provide a strong foundation for implementing partners to launch their own interventions from, as it creates an enabling environment with dual-sided support for give-back activities.

All partners also offer an annual or biannual service day where scholars undertake a collective give-back activity that they plan and run. Different partners observe other days of service, whether institutional, national, or international (such as Mandela Day). Scholars are also supported to work in groups on give-back projects, with the Foundation providing funding and partners overseeing a formal tracking and evaluation process. In this way, scholars are encouraged to think about their give-back efforts from an impact standpoint, while also being allowed the latitude to find more personal avenues for give-back that align with their individual experience.

> *In Ghana your give-back is not necessarily monetary. It is anything that you do to help somebody else in society ... They do it at home, they help siblings ... So to be able to*

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> *formalise it and say whatever you're doing, record it to make it a formal activity, let's document it, let's share it. But this was sort of at odds with how people would naturally go about it. Internally we had our own way of trying to declutter and say look guys it is as simple as going to clean up at the beach near your campus, doing extra classes. Anything that you do to help society is part of give-back. But it has to be [conscious], it has to be organised and more importantly, if we can see how effective it is then it's even a double plus. (Institution F, Ghana, Personal interview, 2022)*

The response by Institution F raises several important issues relating to how give-back is implemented across the scholarship programme. For one, while several partners agreed that there are many ways to give back and have social impact, the cultural motivations for giving back, that is, an innate ubuntu ethics, may compete with the format established across the partner ecosystem, which is focused on supporting scholars to engage in targeted give-back projects with demonstrable impact. Scholars may not conceive of certain actions as give-back or begin to interpret give-back actions in terms of an implicit hierarchy of value, based on perceptions of scale and impact.

The more recent programme shift towards give-back with systemic impact has reinforced the need for scholars to develop and demonstrate their capacities for give-back in ways that produce tangible results. This can foreclose the possibility of scholars developing innovative solutions through more ad hoc and process-focused activities. Moreover, it runs counter to the layered nature of scholars' give-back efforts after graduation, which are first and foremost concerned with establishing a sound, and often collective/familial, financial foundation from which a more robust future vision can be pursued. Continuing with give-back activities after graduation is thus where real challenges emerge, which include limited time or available finances, or lack of clarity about what to do or where to start. Because scholars are encouraged to work in groups on give-back interventions, their university and scholarship programme networks remain a key pathway through which they continue to engage in give-back after graduation. In some instances, these have yielded impressive collaborations:

> *One thing that I really like watching is that we have students from different disciplines such as engineering and business. And they sort of naturally come together to start different projects … So, we have one group that's kind of a mix of global logistic students, as well as mechanical engineering students who have created a project … a tomato growing operation in Ghana. And then it also has a training and youth development component. They've won thousands and thousands of dollars in different social venture competitions, but they've been able to scale it up … it's been really cool to watch. (Institution C, USA, Personal interview, 2020)*

Scholars have been able to leverage the mobility and additional resourcing offered by the scholarship programme to design give-back projects that respond to problems, address local needs, and generate income for themselves and others. Diaspora scholars (those educated and living off-continent) are an unusual category because they are more likely to undertake planned, institutionalised outreach trips to Africa (often in their home countries), where they engage in extended give-back projects and cultivate relationships

with specific partner organisations on the ground. Scholars at African universities also engage in outreach, but enter these activities through more localised connections, cultivating relationships through ongoing engagements and often over longer periods of time. From the data we can identify an emerging hypothesis that these relationships are durable specifically because of the reduced cultural and geographical distance between scholars at African universities and the communities they engage in give-back with. This suggests that scholars educated on the continent may have a more seamless experience in connecting give-back activities to their own contextually-located values and goals, given that they remain embedded within recognisable frameworks of social reciprocity.

Conclusion

The scholarship programme recruits beneficiaries who demonstrate a commitment to giving back. Still, individual factors alone do not influence decisions to give-back and motivations should be studied within social and political contexts (Joseph & Carolissen, 2019), for example, the global COVID-19 pandemic (Mahali et al., 2021), election violence or the humanitarian crises in Ethiopia. It was found that there were a number of factors that shaped the kind and extent of the influence that alumni were able to wield in the world, including their employment status, their age, and their networks, as well as issues of affordability, time and opportunity. In this context, it is appropriate that current university efforts to promote social consciousness should focus on practical ways of making a difference by developing agency, mentoring others, raising awareness, and collaborating to foster community development programmes.

The scholarship programme further nurtures and supports (through provision of resources and by encouraging collaborative network engagement) scholars' propensity for giving back during the funded degree making this the central business of the programme rather than a non-core activity as it is typically perceived (in favour of teaching and learning) at universities in Africa (Dube & Hendricks, 2023). Young people need both the inclination and the capacity to give, and that capacity is determined by the support one receives through, for example, "connection to charitable organisations (measured by social capital and volunteering) … and human and financial capital variables" (Wang & Graddy, 2008, p. 28). Alumni really understand give-back in relation to their own scholarship and the way they apply it is through their own personal and collective resources, and through sharing the range of capitals acquired during the scholarship.

Motivation for giving back was found to be innate for many alumni. Even where giving may come at some sacrifice or personal cost, alumni described this as moral and social responsibility and as inherent to Africanness, in other words as an ubuntu ethics that "promotes the spirit that one should live for others" (Munyaka & Motlhabi, 2009, p. 69). As a result, most alumni intend continuing to give back in future, on an even larger scale. Alumni demonstrate that giving back, if it is done at all "will always be partial and incomplete" (Gupta & Kelly, 2014, p. 6). That giving back is not a 'purist endeavour' (Diver & Higgins, 2014) and it is often inconsistent (Sasser, 2014). Feminist and indigenous scholars remind us how "'giving back' should be a model of solidarity and movement

building, not charity" (Gupta & Kelly, 2014, p. 6). In that regard, what has emerged from asking alumni about give-back is this notion that giving has a social ripple effect that can aid in the development of families, communities, and countries broadly. It is critical to conduct research of this nature if the future of the African university is to continue to pioneer engaged scholarship and the solutions needed to solve development and social justice problems.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Ubuntu as a valued capability for university students in South Africa

Ubuntu en tant que compétence valorisée pour les étudiants universitaires en Afrique du Sud

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ABSTRACT

Universities in South Africa have the potential to advance various dimensions of human development, including well-being. However, this potential can be constrained by historical processes of oppression and the negation of indigenous ways of being and doing. Applying the capabilities approach (Sen, 1999) as a normative framework for the outcomes of university education in the South African context, we argue for a focus on the centrality of capabilities (real freedoms) in assessing how well universities are doing in supporting student well-being. We pay special attention to one capability which we see as architectonic for other freedoms, which is ubuntu. Although ubuntu is generally understood as a moral philosophy, in this article we articulate it as a valued capability in the space of higher education. Our argument is based on data collected through qualitative and participatory approaches in two longitudinal research projects that were carried out between 2016 and 2021 with undergraduate students in different South African universities. In the discussion of the findings, we explain how ubuntu underpins the ways students tend to relate to each other – as interdependent partners of a learning community, rather than as independent individuals who happen to be in the same learning environment. Building on these descriptions of deeply relational ways of being at university, ways that embrace an African indigenous worldview, we argue that creating the conditions for students to achieve the capability of ubuntu has decolonial potential.

KEYWORDS

Capabilities, higher education, student experience, ubuntu, well-being

RÉSUMÉ

En Afrique du Sud, les universités ont le potentiel de promouvoir divers aspects du développement humain, notamment le bien-être. Cependant, ce potentiel peut être entravé par des facteurs d'oppression historiques et la négation des modes de vie et du savoir-faire autochtones. En appliquant l'approche des compétences (Sen, 1999) en tant que cadre normatif pour les résultats de l'enseignement universitaire dans le contexte sud-africain, nous plaidons en faveur d'une focalisation sur la centralité des compétences (libertés réelles) dans l'évaluation de la manière dont les universités contribuent au bien-être des étudiants. Nous accordons une attention particulière à une compétence que nous considérons comme architectonique d'autres libertés, à savoir l'***Ubuntu***. Bien que l'Ubuntu

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soit généralement compris comme une philosophie morale, dans cet article, nous le présentons en tant que compétence valorisée dans l'espace de l'enseignement supérieur. Notre argumentation s'appuie sur des données recueillies au moyen d'approches qualitatives et participatives dans le cadre de deux projets de recherche longitudinaux menés entre 2016 et 2021 avec des étudiants de premier cycle dans différentes universités d'Afrique du Sud. Dans la discussion des résultats, nous expliquons comment l'*Ubuntu* sous-tend la manière dont les étudiants interagissent les uns avec les autres, en tant que partenaires interdépendants d'une même communauté d'apprentissage, plutôt qu'en tant qu'individus autonomes qui se retrouvent dans un même environnement d'apprentissage. En nous appuyant sur ces descriptions d'un mode de vie universitaire profondément relationnel qui embrasse une vision du monde autochtone africaine, nous soutenons que la création des conditions pour que les étudiants atteignent la compétence d'Ubuntu a un potentiel décolonial.

MOTS-CLÉS
Compétences, enseignement supérieur, expérience étudiante, ubuntu, bien-être

Introduction

Although universities can promote human development (Boni & Walker, 2016) and they can be transformative (Ashwin, 2020) they can also establish new and renovated oppression systems (Nyamnjoh & Jua, 2002) or maintain structures of oppression towards historically marginalised groups (Grosfoguel et al., 2016). This is evident in South African higher education, which has a long way to go to achieve fundamental transformation and epistemic decolonisation (Heleta & Chasi, 2023; Heleta, 2016). For this reason, the exploration of what it means to decolonise universities in South Africa continues to gain traction (Jansen, 2019; Muswede, 2017; Le Grange, 2016). This body of work includes research that addresses what needs to change in South African universities to redress past injustices that influence inequality of access, participation and outcomes in higher education, particularly for black students from low-income households (see Walker et al., 2022). But scholars have also shown that despite their limitations, universities offer possibilities for young people to develop valued capabilities and the freedom to flourish (Calitz, 2019). This is evident in literature that is based on empirical research that examines the relationship between higher education and human development through a capabilities lens, including research by Calitz (2019); Dejaeghere (2020); Mkwananzi (2018); Mutanga (2020); Walker (2006); Wilson-Strydom (2015); Wilson-Strydom and Walker (2015). This literature has produced open-ended ideal theoretical lists of capabilities that are considered important to be developed and enhanced by universities in South Africa. To build on this literature, this article draws from empirical data gathered through two separate research projects that were carried out between 2016 and 2021 to discuss ubuntu as a valued capability for university students.

The article is divided into seven sections. In the next section we define ubuntu and explain how it differs from conceptions of humanity based on Western moral philosophy. In section three we review selected literature by capability scholars who have conducted research in the South African higher education space to point out the strengths and limitations of this work but also to justify the articulation of ubuntu as a capability that suffuses, and at the same time is separate from, but architectonic to capabilities such as 'social relations and networks' or 'respect, dignity and recognition' and 'values for the

public good'. In section four, we contextualise the data from which we draw to support our argument. We present reflections on our interpretation of the data in section five, where we highlight how ubuntu is being practised by students and why it matters for them to do so. In section six, we explain why practising ubuntu or achieving the capability of ubuntu has decolonial potential. We also suggest what universities can do to support this capability before summarizing our argument and drawing conclusions in the last section.

A brief explanation of ubuntu

Ubuntu is a southern African Nguni word that can roughly be translated as humanness. The word has become synonymous with the southern African-rooted worldview and moral philosophy premised on the idea that '*Umntu ngumntu ngabantu*' which means 'a person is a person through other people' or 'I am because we are' (Shutte, 1993, p. 46). Ubuntu thus implies that each person exists because others do, and that interaction between people necessarily involves mutuality and cooperation, to the extent that others' lives and well-being are inextricably linked to the individual's life and well-being (Migheli, 2017). That is, it entails necessarily reciprocal interactions between individuals, which render us human (Tutu, 1999). This suggests that an individual's humanity is, under ideal circumstances, expressed in relationship with other people (Battle, 2000) and as such, ubuntu can serve as a social ethic (Molefe, 2016; Rapatsa, 2016) because it carries normative implications for how people should relate to each other or what our moral obligation is towards others (Le Grange, 2012; Rapatsa, 2016).

As Metz and Gaie (2010) point out, there are two ways that morality as embodied in ubuntu is distinct from Western approaches to morality. The first distinction is that with ubuntu, morality is relational in the sense that the only way to develop one's humanness is to relate to others in a constructive way. This implies that the only path to becoming a dignified person is through developing other persons; which means one cannot connect with their moral self or achieve moral goodness in isolation from others (Metz & Gaie, 2010). According to ubuntu, our deepest moral obligation is to become more fully human, and achieving this necessitates relationship and entering more sincerely into community with others (Metz & Gaie, 2010).

The second way that African morality differs from Western moral philosophy is that it defines positive relationship with others in communal terms (Metz & Gaie, 2010). Common themes in Western moral philosophy include respecting individual human rights grounded on consent, political participation or maximising general welfare, whereas the ideal way to relate to others, based on ubuntu, is to seek out community with them (Metz & Gaie, 2010). Therefore, the humanness referred to in ubuntu finds expression in communal contexts (while not eschewing the person, see Molefe, 2016) rather than in contexts where individualism is most valued. The kind of individualism valued in institutions like universities leans towards Western and neoliberal values that are at odds with the idea(l)s of ubuntu (Le Grange 2012; Venter 2004). That is, the emphasis on individual excellence commonly praised and rewarded in academia encourages a competitive stance that pushes students to see each other as

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opponents in the process of learning and acquiring a degree, rather than viewing each other as learning partners who belong to the same community. This in turn can erode students' sense of ubuntu, which has implications for learning outcomes and well-being achievement (Walker et al., 2022).

Our review of studies conducted by capability scholars shows that black students from low socio-economic backgrounds in South Africa value and practise ubuntu, and that they benefit from doing so in terms of learning, and for developing a sense of belonging in university. However, this valuing of ubuntu is often subsumed within discussions on the capability for 'social relations and networks' or 'respect, dignity and recognition'. As we point out in the next section, it is important to articulate ubuntu as a separate but overarching capability.

Articulating ubuntu as a capability

The capabilities approach as a theoretical framework to assess human development became influential during the 1990s. It expanded the evaluative space for understanding well-being – not as a static set of criteria that dictate what renders a life worth living, but as a dynamic process where individual valued freedoms are central in the assessment of what constitutes a good life (Sen, 1999). The approach focuses on capabilities, or the real freedoms that are available for individuals; and then functionings or achieved freedoms that have been operationalised by the individual (Sen, 1999). Sen (1999) makes a distinction between capabilities and functionings to highlight that there are circumstances (conversion factors) that can limit or enable individuals to exercise their freedom; such that when we make a judgement about someone's achievements, we should look not only at the outcomes (functionings) but also what effective opportunities (capabilities) they were presented with. This distinction has implications for educational research, as it encourages a nuanced interpretation of data on student well-being, and how well-being can be jeopardised by various social, environmental or personal conversion factors (Robeyns, 2018).

When applied as a normative and evaluative framework for the purposes and outcomes of universities, the capability approach suggests that we query how universities contribute to the expansion of the freedoms that individuals have reason to value. For instance, the capability approach encourages us to ask questions such as: Are students' valued capabilities and functionings being enhanced by universities? Do university teaching and learning conditions widen students' capability sets? How can universities reduce institutional constraints that leave their staff and students with few opportunities to do and to be what they have reason to value? To answer these and other related questions, scholars of the capability approach have used its core concepts and tenets to assess the conditions under which educational institutions are or are not promoting student well-being. In particular, a growing body of literature on higher education research has yielded a range of capabilities lists (see Table 1 below).

Table 1: Selected higher education capabilities lists

Walker, 2006	Wilson-Strydom, 2016	Calitz, 2019	Mutanga, 2020
A general capability list for higher education participation	A capability list for school to university transition	A capability list for equality and participation in university	A capability list for university participation for students with disabilities
Knowledge and imagination	Knowledge and imagination	Student research	Knowledge and imagination
Social relations and social networks	*Social relations and networks*	*Critical affiliation*	*Social relations and social networks*
Respect, dignity and recognition	*Respect, dignity and recognition*	*Values for the public good*	*Respect, dignity and recognition*
Practical reason	Practical reason	Practical reason	
Educational resilience	Educational resilience		Educational resilience
Learning disposition	Learning disposition	Critical literacies	
Emotional integrity	Emotional integrity		
Bodily integrity	Bodily integrity		
	Language competence and confidence		Language
			Identity
		Deliberative participation	Self-Advocacy
			Aspirations
			Independence
			Faith/Religion
			Mobility

Capabilities lists are intended to provoke dialogue amongst practitioners, managers, leaders and students about what we take to be 'quality' in standards of teaching and learning in universities, and genuinely educative (good) experiences of higher education (Walker, 2006). And as Walker (2006) argues, capabilities lists are necessary because they: (a) help to focus the capability approach on the specificities of higher education; (b) provide a basis to advocate for higher education pedagogy and practice that explicitly aim to promote valued opportunities and equality; and (c) test the usefulness and possible applications of the capabilities approach in higher education contexts. Walker's (2006) list comprises of capabilities that are arguably central to any higher education process that seeks to enhance humanity, effective agency and well-being. Her reasoning has influenced particular applications of the capability approach, and her logic has been usefully applied to a range of topics. For example, scholars have developed capabilities lists for school to university transitions (Wilson-Strydom, 2016); higher education

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equality and participation (Calitz, 2019); and university participation and outcomes for students with disabilities (Mutanga, 2020). There are some similarities across these lists and they all reference Walker's (2006) work and corroborate the importance of certain freedoms for student well-being in the South African context. In Table 1 above we have mapped the most commonly occurring capabilities in descending order. This helps to clarify that, in these studies, freedoms associated with learning (knowledge and imagination; student research) are stressed just as much as freedoms associated with the values of ubuntu (social relations and networks, critical affiliation, respect, dignity and recognition, values for the public good), which we have italicised for emphasis.

What we see in this literature is that 'social relations and social networks' and 'respect, dignity and recognition' (in Walker, Wilson-Strydom and Mutanga's work) and 'values for the public good' and 'critical affiliation' (in Calitz's work) all strongly speak to principles of the moral philosophy of ubuntu, such as mutual cooperation, reciprocal support and community affiliation. For example, drawing from Walker's (2006) list, both Mutanga (2020) and Wilson-Strydom (2016, p. 151) describe the key elements of the capability for social relations and networks as: "Being able to participate in a *group* for learning, *working with others* to solve problems or tasks, *collaborative* and *participatory* learning". This entails "Being able to form good *networks of friendships and belonging* for learning support and leisure. *Mutual trust"* [own emphasis]. While for Calitz (2019, p. 158) the capability for critical affiliation is defined as "a form of *social support* with staff and other mentors" [own emphasis] which entails students *being recognised and treated as valued members of their university communities*, whilst having opportunities to be critical of the oppressive structures within which these support systems operate.

From this literature, we see that scholars have conducted deeply contextual enquiry on what university students in South Africa value in their educational experiences and for their well-being. The capabilities lists that have been developed from this literature reveal the importance of social relations and mutual support in improving the university experiences of students in general, but marginalised students especially. There is clearly an emphasis on values that are synonymous to expressions of ubuntu. But rather than have ubuntu subsumed and implied in the above mentioned capabilities, we foreground its centrality and argue that it suffuses other capabilities and is therefore architectonic (Le Grange, 2012). Articulating ubuntu as an architectonic capability adds ontological specificity to what student well-being entails in the South African context. Finally, we see articulating capabilities in ways that reflect indigenous philosophy and worldviews as part of the work needed to rethink and decolonise our understanding of what student well-being means in specific contexts. The research projects that inspire this view and the articulation of ubuntu as a capability are described next, and then we move onto a discussion of the data from these projects which inform our theorisation.

The Miratho and Democratic Capabilities Research projects

The argument we present in this article is inspired by data from and reflections on two different research projects. The first project is the Miratho project which employed qualitative methods (life-history interviews), participatory research (photovoice), and

quantitative methods (a survey) to research the university journeys of 66 low-income rural and township students across five universities in South Africa from 2016 to 2021. During the life-history interviews conducted each year, students were asked about university teaching and learning conditions, assessment arrangements, academic progress, overall university experience etc. but also about their aspirations for the future and what they valued from the university experience and for their lives. All interview recordings were transcribed and coded using Nvivo software and deductive-inductive coding to categorise the data into themes and subthemes. For example, 'teaching, learning and assessment' as a thematic category included subthemes such as: 'teaching'; 'lecturers' expectations of students'; 'assessment practices'; 'relationship between lecturers and students'; 'students' descriptions of their approaches to learning'; and 'student self-assessment of academic progress'.

The coded data were interpreted using conceptual tools from the capability approach and a human development framing, which led to the identification of eight capability domains (including ubuntu) that support student well-being and are foundational to inclusive learning outcomes (see Walker et al., 2022).

The second project is the Democratic Capabilities Research (DCR) project. This enquiry was a case study exploration with a group of 12 undergraduate students at one South African university. This study aimed to investigate a participatory research project focusing on students' valued capabilities, as conceptualised by students themselves. It explored ways of being and doing that students have reason to value and how, if at all, the participatory project was able to expand these capabilities. Interviews, participant observation, participant diaries and workshops were used as methods for data collection in 2017 and 2018. All the datasets followed an iterative process, in which they were recorded, transcribed and analysed using Nvivo, to later be discussed and revised by the undergraduate participants. Therefore, in this project, the students were actively involved in scrutinising a capabilities list that was closely related to the lives they have reason to value. Four central capabilities arose from this study: (1) epistemic, (2) ubuntu, (3) human recognition and (4) self-development (see Martinez-Vargas, 2022). These capabilities were central for the 12 participant students. Furthermore, due to the importance and centrality of the identified ubuntu capability, after research concluded in 2018, a follow up interview was carried out in 2019 regarding this capability. Each student reiterated their initial conceptualisation of this ubuntu capability, corroborating and expanding the data gathered during the participatory project.

Working separately on our respective projects, we learned through informal discussions over time that we were drawing similar conclusions about the importance of ubuntu as a valued freedom. The methodology of this article is therefore unorthodox, as we base the article on data collected for two separate research projects – whose parallels in terms of analysis and findings only became apparent in hindsight. However, in writing, we analysed the coded data across both projects together. This joint interpretation of how students across both projects valued and practised ubuntu is discussed as part of the findings in the next section. It is important to note that we focus only on the interview data across both projects. Although conducted separately, the interview

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schedules of both projects similarly covered questions on childhood, upbringing, schooling, family, and relationships as well as university experiences. Our discussion of findings contains excerpts of passages from the interview transcripts that we coded as references to ubuntu. In some cases, the word 'ubuntu' was used specifically by the students, but in other cases we extrapolated for meaning based on descriptions of what students said they value doing and being at university, or how they described getting through certain challenges they faced.

Whilst our interpretation of this coded data uses the vocabulary of the capability approach as an analytical framework, we draw from Hoffman and Metz (2017); Metz and Gaie (2010); and Le Grange (2012) to think of capabilities in more relational terms. That is, we apply the capability approach from an African and relational ontological perspective, which means we see individual freedoms as inextricably linked to the freedoms of others, and as constituted through relationships. This allows us to address some shortcomings of the approach, like the critique that it pays insufficient attention to the role of relationships in shaping capabilities (Robeyns, 2018). A relational approach also questions the ontological individualism that is assumed by some scholars using the capability approach (Dejaeghere, 2020). For these reasons, in this article we address a specific capability that individual students hold, but we pay particular attention to the dynamic relationalities (Dejaeghere, 2020) students experience in educational environments.

Although some might argue that the African philosophy of ubuntu cannot be applied alongside the capability approach which is an evaluative framework for well-being that is seen as representing Western thought. We support the argument that Sen's notion of capabilities and freedoms implies an ontology of a relational society (Smith & Seward, 2009; Ibrahim, 2006) where interconnectedness is an irreducible feature of reality (Martins, 2007). Whilst ubuntu offers a moral compass and normative descriptions for developing our humanness, the capability approach offers a normative and evaluative framework for well-being. When brought together a more nuanced interpretive schema is created – one that merges African and Western thought, instead of dichotomising the two. As such, our interpretation of the data is informed by an ubuntu-based capability approach (Chipango, 2023). This is built on the ideas of Hoffman and Metz (2017) who argue that the capability approach is enriched by an ubuntu theoretical grounding on relational capabilities. This helps us to acknowledge how deeply relational all intuitively important capabilities are; and it reminds us to account for capabilities that result from social interaction and are unachievable by single individuals (Ibrahim, 2020).

Ubuntu as a valued capability for university students

The Miratho project foregrounded how ubuntu suffused students' approaches to their relationships with each other and with others. Ubuntu was evident in the students' heartfelt concerns to improve the lives of their families and communities; they aspired to use their university education to this end. As Menzi explained: "I'm not only studying for myself, I'm studying for the community". This sentiment is apparent in Rito's reflections on the importance of uplifting others in the process of achieving upward

social mobility: “as you go up you have to be pulling another brother up, who is going to pull another one up”. Ubuntu was evident in students’ emphasis on respect for and responsibility towards others, and in the importance of the extended family, but also in the importance of sharing what one has with other students (e.g. food, books, a laptop, money or accommodation). As Sabelo said, “people help you when you have nothing, so when you have something you must give back”. Students talked about “picking each other up” during their struggles so that they might all achieve their academic goals. But they also alluded to the difficulty of practising ubuntu at university because as Rito explained: “everyone is just minding their own business … you might find a person stays for five years without even knowing who their neighbour is. So the connection we have in rural communities allows us to be interdependent, compared to when you are this [city] side”. Similarly, Rimisa hinted at the erosion of what he understands as traditional African cultural norms: “in African cultures, they used to share their things, their knowledge. It was not individualistic. Everything was done communally”. There was a keen awareness amongst the students that interdependence is important because a person needs other people “to unlock your potential”, Rito said. Or “when you isolate yourself you die slowly”, as Bonani put it. Or as another student said: “you need other people to survive socially and academically”. Importantly, these students do not see success only as an individual achievement that is linked to acquiring a degree for their own advancement in life. As Bongeka explained: “if you do not plan on helping other people in some way or another, you’re not yet successful”. The aspiration to make a positive contribution to their community was expressed often, and it is clear that the values of ubuntu influenced this aspiration. As Rimisa said: “Archbishop Desmond Tutu said you are what you are because of other people … so that’s what I’m going to do. I am going to help the community”.

Similarly, in the DCR project ubuntu was evidenced throughout the qualitative data in statements like Themba’s, explaining that ubuntu is a “collective consciousness” that promotes the idea that “as humanity, we are all interconnected” or, as Amahle put it: “My existence is … linked to your existence” and as Kungawo explained: “It is a human thing. We need other people. That’s just reality”. The students thus highlight that in their view, human beings are connected in a way that reflects “a very strong sense of co-dependence” said Themba. That is, co-dependence in the sense that taking on the moral responsibility for improving the well-being of others is part of developing one’s own well-being. As Themba explained, it is about a “sense of trust and responsibility between you and the next person” and a “sense of responsibility for someone when you have the opportunity to give them or be there for them when they could not be there for themselves”. As Khayone asserts, a person who practises ubuntu is one “who helps others to be successful. It is not about me, it is all about the community, or it’s all about the well-being of other people. I want to see people being successful”.

Based on these descriptions, it is clear that the students perceived their well-being as connected to the well-being of others, where this connection is mediated by a sense of responsibility, a set of values (recognition, reciprocity, mutuality, community, dignity)

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and practices (beings and doings in capabilities language) that inform the life students want to lead at university, and how they want to relate to each other.

Also evident in the data across both projects, is that there are two main phases that expand as a spiral in the process of practising ubuntu. First, is the phase of empathy to the other (being empathetic); this is understanding the need in someone else, empathising with them and having a sense of solidarity with their needs and pain (or joy); like "really, being able to understand what a person is going through" (Kungawo). Kungawo recognises the need of others and the humanity of that need, empathising with difficult situations that fellow students are facing, to the point of developing a sense of responsibility. However, it is important to note that having such a sense of responsibility is often not considered as a burden to these students, but as a way of living or leading their lives, which they have reason to value: "It's just because I feel responsible for you that I do that …Ubuntu is not about pity. It is not about feeling sorry about someone else […] there is not that feeling of shame or burden" (Themba). What Themba is referring to goes beyond cognitive empathy, which is an intellectual understanding of the perceived ill-being of another (Goetz et al., 2010). Themba refers instead to compassionate empathy which is a feeling that inspires action (Goetz et al., 2010). Compassionate empathy moves us past simply understanding the emotional experiences of others and compels us to take substantive action to create change (Goetz et al., 2010).

The second phase of practising ubuntu relates to the action step ('doing' empathy). Compassionate empathy and the mediation of the feeling of responsibility for the well-being of others, guides one towards action that can mitigate the discomfort, pain or needs experienced by another human being. Therefore, as Minenhle put it, "if someone is in need, I can help them" or "Ubuntu is saying come in, you need this, so this is how I can help" (Minenhle). Moreover, as the process is not framed as a closed circle, it is repeated expansively. As the students explain it, giving is not necessarily done as a favour or in expectation of a reward or return of the favour in the future: "If I help you, it does not mean you have to help me in return […] It is a generational cycle of giving" Khayone explained, or as Themba said: "the whole point of the giving is not because you are expecting [that] someone else gives you back".

Themba, like all the students in the DCR and Miratho projects, holds a collective view of success. This is not unusual for students who experience obstacles and adversities during their higher education journeys. In most cases, they will need significant support from someone (not always a family member) to help them succeed. They therefore have a keen awareness of the importance of reciprocity, and they find it important to acknowledge the support (financial, moral, and emotional) without which many black students are at a high risk of dropping out of university (Masutha & Naidoo, 2021). This makes the students view their obtaining a university degree not as an individual triumph, but as a collective achievement which has communal and public-good value (Fongwa, 2019). And as reflected in the interview data, students' lived experiences encourage reciprocity and moral responsibility towards the well-being of others, suggesting that for them ubuntu is not only moral philosophy – a perspective of how the world should be and how people should relate to each other. It is also valuable to them as a capability –

the freedom and effective opportunity to be a university student and to 'do' university according to the values and principles of ubuntu.

As a capability in the higher education space, ubuntu can be described as the freedom to express compassionate empathy, and to develop one's humanity by building mutually beneficial and reciprocal communities of learning. In other words, ubuntu as a capability in higher education encompasses forming relationships that capacitate others to achieve valued learning outcomes in a fully-fledged way. We therefore support Le Grange's (2012) view that the capability of ubuntu can be seen as architectonic; pervading all other educational capabilities highlighted in the literature review – in its implication that our well-being, and anything that we are able to do or to be, is interconnected with and dependent on the existence of other people.

All students in the Miratho and DCR projects valued ubuntu, but not all of them could practise it. So they were able to achieve the first phase, but not the second, which is fundamental for a complete expression of personhood. For both phases to be achievable, the effective opportunity to practise ubuntu in universities must be present, and as we explain in the following section – achieving this capability has decolonial potential.

The decolonial potential of achieving the capability of ubuntu

Le Grange (2012) argues that many problems or challenges facing southern Africa have arisen largely because ubuntu values have become eroded through decades of apartheid-capitalism and centuries of colonialism. In many ways, the legacies of colonialism live on in institutions like universities, through the Western ontologies, values and ideals that typically underlie and inform how people see the world, see themselves in it, and understand how they should relate to each other. The legacies of colonialism also live on in universities through the dominance of Western epistemologies that underpin research and knowledge production processes (Escobar, 2007). As a result, universities in South Africa operate according to value hierarchies that push African and indigenous worldviews, ontologies and epistemologies to the margins (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018) and keep the teaching of African thought, African philosophy and African ways of relating to others minimal (Sesanti, 2015; Okeja, 2012). This is despite the proliferation of African scholars whose work could be integrated into existing curricula: Kwasi Wiredu, Kwame Appiah, Achille Mbembe, Henry Odera Oruka, and Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze are examples (Goldhill, 2018). These scholars/philosophers might not necessarily focus on totally different topics covered in Western philosophy, but as Goldhill (2018) reminds us, the Western canon does not hold the only ways to explore our understanding of the world and our existence. For example, the edited volume by Mutanga (2023) demonstrates how ubuntu philosophy can be applied as a conceptual, analytical and interpretive lens on research about disability. The volume thus shows that ideas about living a good life, living ethically, or the nature of free will can be found elsewhere, informed by a range of African cultures and customs and communal outlooks (Goldhill, 2018). These communal outlooks can also influence the study of knowledge. For example, an ubuntu-based epistemology (Tavernaro-Haidarian, 2018) might suggest that

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objects be studied and understood primarily according to their relationship with context and surroundings rather than according to their intrinsic properties (Goldhill, 2018). And whereas much of Western philosophy focuses on self-realization and achieving morality as an individual undertaking, ubuntu, which permeates much of African thought, insists that self-realization is a communal process (Goldhill, 2018).

Drawing from these ideas, and from the data presented in the previous section, we see various ways through which universities can create opportunities for students to practise ubuntu. For example they can acknowledge African indigenous worldviews that affect how students see the world and their positions in it; encourage cooperative learning and collective success instead of overemphasising competitiveness and individual excellence; and facilitate the use of participatory pedagogies and participatory research that support reciprocal, mutual and communal learning.

When students achieve the capability of ubuntu or practise ubuntu in university spaces an act of defiance is constituted against colonial legacies and neoliberal values that maintain or exacerbate epistemic injustices in higher education institutions by overlooking indigenous worldviews, values, norms and ideals. This is where the decolonial potential of ubuntu lies. Rather than encourage self-centred notions of academic success and excellence, ubuntu stands in contrast to individualism and insensitive competitiveness (Anofuechi, 2022). Instead, it celebrates the relational dimension of knowledge-making and interdependence in processes of learning such that the value of learning is not centred on serving the individual but on serving the community. This foregrounds the moral dimension of education for meaningful inclusion (Mutanga, 2022) and the development of personhood (van Norren, 2022). However, as Khoza (1994) points out, practising ubuntu should not be equated with a collectivism that emphasises the role of community to the point that it dehumanizes the individual. Rather, the emphasis on community should be seen as the acknowledgement of the limited range of possibilities for individual self-sufficiency (Gyekye, 1995).

Nevertheless, it is important to emphasise that practising ubuntu in universities has proved difficult, and operationalising it in contexts of struggle and unequal power relations requires constant negotiation, criticality and careful application. As Marovah (2021) states, the philosophy of ubuntu may not apply perfectly where there is limited democratic space or where neoliberal and capitalist ideas are deeply entrenched. An example of imperfect application of ubuntu is given in Mtawa's (2019) work on service-learning and its contribution to human development in South Africa – where he warns against paternalistic forms of ubuntu, which can suppress instead of enhancing diverse valued freedoms. Despite this challenge, ubuntu is worth consideration in debates on decolonisation, where its intellectual and philosophical richness and theoretical grounding in valued practices emanating from southern Africa can be demonstrated and critically explored (see Mutanga & Marovah, 2023; Müller et al., 2019; Sartorius, 2022; and van Norren, 2022).

Conclusion

In this article we have described what ubuntu means to groups of university students and how this understanding of ubuntu can stimulate debates on capabilities that higher education institutions ought to protect and enhance in South Africa. We discussed literature that highlights which freedoms matter in making university experiences more inclusive and outcomes more equitable for students in South Africa. This literature review showed that capabilities identified by African scholars indicate a culturally sensitive understanding of the reasons why some capabilities matter more than others, or why certain ways of being and doing are valued more than others for the goal of achieving well-being in higher education contexts.

Reflecting on empirical qualitative data from two research projects, we presented ubuntu as a capability. We argued that ubuntu can be seen as an architectonic capability for participant students, who clearly had good reasons to value mutually reciprocal ways of being and doing as a way of becoming respected and dignified human beings even under conditions that are not ideal, or within institutions that do not fully support this way of being. We provided examples of how students promoted ubuntu freedoms for fellow students on a daily basis; by seeking out ways to support each other through mutually beneficial cycles of help, with the aim of obtaining university degrees not only as means to improve their individual well-being, but for the benefit of their families and the communities from which they come.

One of the strengths of applying the capability approach as an analytical lens in both projects is that it allowed us to situate students' valued ways of being at the centre of discussions about what higher education should achieve in South Africa. In this way, the capability approach provided a linguistic and conceptual framework to understand what kind of lives these students have reason to pursue, whilst at the same time prompting us to consider the changing realities and structural constrains that get in the way of students' aspirations and well-being attainment. On the other hand, bringing African philosophy and Western thought into conversation allowed us to consider what relational approaches to well-being can offer the capabilities approach. We have argued that articulating ubuntu as a capability not only allows us to see how it speaks to the importance of social relations and networks identified as valued capabilities in the literature we discussed earlier. It also allows us to acknowledge ubuntu as a valued freedom in the South African higher education context; one that arguably supersedes all other capabilities and has decolonial power when achieved. We conclude that African worldviews and philosophies like ubuntu are not observed by universities. It is lacking in their ethos, curricula, pedagogy and research practices. However, as our data show, many students practise ubuntu in small ways. It is up to universities to support this important capability by creating the conditions for practising it more widely.

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Ethics statement

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Potential conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

An analysis of digital stories of self-care practices among first-year students at a university of technology in South Africa

Analyse des récits numériques sur les pratiques de soins auto-administrés parmi les étudiants de première année d'une université de technologie en Afrique du Sud

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ABSTRACT

This article reports on a qualitative study that explored self-care practices among first-year students in managing stressors related to the first-year experience in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Qualitative data were collected using a purposive sample between March and June 2022. A total of 26 first-year students registered at a university of technology in South Africa participated in the study by producing digital stories sharing how they practised self-care. The domains of self-care were adopted as a framework and data were analysed using thematic analysis. Six domains of self-care practices emerged from the data and were categorised as physical, emotional, spiritual, relational, professional, and psychological. The findings show that first-year students engaged in a range of self-care practices across the domains of self-care including exercising, listening to music, performing ancestral rituals, donating blood, following successful people on social media, and learning new skills. Further, relational self-care was the most fundamental domain that underpinned first-year students' well-being. In contrast, oversleeping or sleep deprivation, reckless spending, and eating unhealthy food to cope with stressors related to the first-year experience pointed to unhealthy self-care practices in managing the stressors. Unhealthy self-care practices can threaten first-year students' well-being and possibly academic success. Student affairs and services need to design self-care programmes and curricula to prevent harm and support adequate self-care. In designing self-care programmes, social involvement and engagement are fundamental principles that should be emphasised. Future studies can develop a self-care inventory to identify students at risk of poor self-care and design targeted interventions to promote self-care.

KEYWORDS

Self-care, well-being, first-year experience, first-year students, digital storytelling, South Africa, stressors, qualitative research

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article présente une étude qualitative qui a exploré les pratiques de soins auto-administrés menées par les étudiants de première année pour gérer les facteurs de stress liés à l'expérience de la première année dans le contexte de la pandémie de COVID-19. Les données qualitatives ont été collectées à l›aide d'un échantillon choisi à dessein entre mars et juin 2022. Au total, 26 étudiants

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de première année inscrits dans une université de technologie en Afrique du Sud ont participé à l'étude en produisant des récits numériques pour partager leur pratique de soins auto-administrés. Les domaines de soins auto-administrés ont été adoptés comme cadre et les données ont été examinées à l'aide d'une analyse thématique. Six domaines de pratiques de soins auto-administrés ont émergé des données et ont été catégorisés comme suit : physique, émotionnel, spirituel, relationnel, professionnel et psychologique. Les résultats montrent que les étudiants de première année s'engagent dans une série de pratiques de soins auto-administrés en fonction des domaines de soins auto-administrés, notamment faire de l'exercice, l'écoute de la musique, la réalisation de rituels ancestraux, le don de sang, le suivi de personnes qui ont réussi sur les médias sociaux et l'apprentissage de nouvelles compétences. En outre, le domaine le plus fondamental qui sous-tend le bien-être des étudiants de première année est celui des soins auto-administrés sur le plan relationnel. Au contraire, dormir trop ou manquer de sommeil, faire des dépenses inconsidérées et manger des aliments malsains pour faire face aux facteurs de stress liés à l'expérience de la première année indiquent des pratiques de soins auto-administrés malsaines dans la gestion des facteurs de stress. Des pratiques de soins auto-administrés malsaines peuvent menacer le bien-être des étudiants de première année et éventuellement leur réussite académique. Les services d'œuvres estudiantines doivent concevoir des programmes de soins auto-administrés et des cursus pour prévenir les dommages et soutenir des soins auto-administrés adéquats. Lors de la conception des programmes de soins auto-administrés, l'implication sociale et l'engagement sont des principes fondamentaux sur lesquels il convient de mettre l'accent. Les études futures pourront développer un inventaire des soins auto-administrés pouvant permettre d'identifier les étudiants à risquent d'une pratique déficiente afin de concevoir des interventions ciblées visant à promouvoir une meilleure pratique des soins auto-administrés.

MOTS-CLÉS
Soins auto-administrés, bien-être, expérience de la première année, étudiants de première année, récit numérique, Afrique du Sud, facteurs de stress, recherche qualitative

Introduction and literature review

Higher education is widely recognised as stressful for first-year students (Mason, 2017). This is because first-year students often experience an intersection of major life transitions (Lenz, 2001), which includes transitioning from late adolescence to young adulthood and from high school to university simultaneously. More generally, late adolescents transitioning to young adulthood face several challenges and tasks. These include developing one's identity (Arnett, 2004), becoming increasingly independent (Settersten & Ray, 2010), exploring social relationships (Veksler & Meyer, 2014), assuming increasing responsibility for their health and well-being (Lenz, 2001), and embarking on a journey toward higher education (Arnett, 2007) and career aspirations. Moreover, it has also long been recognised that the move from high school to university can be stressful and demanding for first-year students (Moses et al., 2016; Tinto & Goodsell, 1994). Challenges related to transitioning from high school to university include academic performance, adapting to campus life, being more independent, financial concerns, and time management (Pretorius & Blaauw, 2020). First-year students may be experiencing independence for the first time, which is associated with being separated from their previous settings.

Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic brought unprecedented stress to first-year students across the world. While all students were affected by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the first-year student population remained a vulnerable population

in higher education (Nyar, 2021). As a consequence of COVID-19, first-year students have had to navigate major life transitions together with the unanticipated move to online teaching and learning (Combrink & Oosthuizen, 2020), which all occurred in the new and unfamiliar university environment (Nyar, 2021). Not surprisingly, Moosa and Bekker (2022) found that first-year students in South Africa experienced anxiety due to the pandemic and its ramifications.

Therefore, navigating the intersection of major life transitions with the COVID-19 pandemic may have been challenging for first-year students. Research examining first-year experiences suggests that the challenges related to transitioning into university often prevent students from being able to care for themselves adequately (Ayala et al., 2018; Mudhovozi, 2011; Naidoo et al., 2014). For example, Bantjes et al. (2022) found higher rates of non-fatal suicidal behaviour among first-year university students in South Africa. Stressors related to the first-year experience in the context of COVID-19 compromised the various aspects of South African first-year students' well-being including the physical, emotional, social and financial (Moosa & Bekker, 2022). Getting enough sleep, healthy eating, and exercising have been reported in assisting students with experiencing less stress and negative mental health challenges (Moses et al., 2016).

While some students can navigate the transitions without any difficulty, others experience adjustment challenges and require support (Gale & Parker, 2014). Bamonti (2014) suggests that self-care operates as a mechanism for health and well-being that students can employ to survive and thrive in their higher education journeys and throughout their life courses. The concept of self-care as an essential component of health promotion became a topic of vigorous scholarly discussion during the COVID-19 pandemic to promote individual health and well-being (Martínez et al., 2021). Broadly defined, self-care refers to intentional and self-directed actions to promote holistic health and well-being (Mills et al., 2018). This definition implies a range of activities that belong to the category of self-care such as healthy eating, exercise, maintaining quality sleep, and emotion regulation strategies (Myers et al., 2012). The context of the COVID-19 pandemic was opportune for investigating the main practices in which first-year students engage for self-care as, for this cohort, the pandemic occurred at the intersection of major transitions in their lives.

Investigating self-care practice among first-year students is crucial because it is experienced in the context of the first year of study which was recently rendered even more complex by the COVID-19 pandemic. They are more likely to experience loneliness and unfulfilling social relationships in the new environment. Research has linked loneliness to negative physical and mental health outcomes (Barankevich & Loebach, 2022). Loneliness or lack of social integration can lead to a lack of interest and ability to engage in self-care practices (Narasimhan et al., 2022). As a result, students often need support in establishing the skills, knowledge, and abilities required to navigate the current environment effectively (Mason, 2017). First-year students specifically grapple not only with the self-adjustment required by the university environment with which they are mostly unfamiliar, but also with self-care demands they may need to prioritise for their academic success.

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Although it is widely acknowledged that self-care involves various practices that potentially shape people's health and well-being, as far as is known, the research exploring self-care practices in the population of South African first-year students is scarce. Despite limited student self-care studies, Saadat et al. (2012) found that female students who displayed positive self-efficacy and positive mental health reported self-care activities for resisting peer influence and risky sexual behaviours and attributed their participation in religious activities and sports as shaping their self-care practices. In Hassed et al. (2009), mindfulness-based stress reduction was found as the most common strategy utilised by medical students to improve anxiety, depression, negative emotions, empathy, self-compassion, and personal control; increase health behaviours; and reduce distraction.

Additionally, student affairs services in many South African universities have designed first-year experience (FYE) programmes to support students in dealing effectively with the stressors related to the first-year experience and to promote well-being. Examples of FYE programmes are orientation seminars (Combrink & Oosthuizen, 2020; Motsabi & Van Zyl, 2017), life coaching (Mogashana et al., 2023), peer mentorship (McConney, 2023) and skills development workshops (Bengesai et al., 2022). However, few of the FYE programmes have been designed using the explicit perspectives of students themselves (Ayala et al., 2017). FYE programmes often emphasise what is wrong with students (Lewin & Mawoyo, 2014) instead of leveraging students' self-care abilities. Thus, students' voices tend to be overlooked in the design of FYE programmes which aim to promote student health and well-being. However, it is important to note that, generally, these programmes are evaluated to improve implementation and to take into consideration students' voices. There is a need to prioritise the perspectives and experiences of students by understanding their self-care ideas and practices.

Therefore, the purpose of the current study was to investigate the student-identified self-care practices of first-year students at a university of technology in South Africa. The significance of this article lies not only in exploring students' self-care practices, but also in offering detailed information on their self-care practices that can be tailored to designing FYE programmes in diverse settings. Such understanding can inform better self-care programming for students in their first year of study as they move into both higher education and young adulthood. Specific self-care interventions that are planned around the simultaneous transition can assist students in successfully bridging the gaps from late adolescence to young adulthood and from high school to university.

Theoretical framework

This study used six domains of self-care (Butler et al., 2019) as its guiding theoretical framework. These six domains of self-care are physical, emotional, spiritual, relational, professional, and psychological, which are premised on the notion that they focus on the whole person. As such, a person is viewed as a holistic being, with different life domains that require attention in each person's self-care practice (Butler et al., 2019). The proponents of the six domains of self-care (Butler et al., 2019) describe them as follows:

- Physical self-care focuses on the needs of the physical body to achieve optimal functioning.
- Professional self-care involves preventing work-related stress and stressors, mitigating the effects of burnout, and increasing work performance and satisfaction.
- Relational self-care involves creating and maintaining interpersonal connections with others.
- Emotional self-care refers to those practices that are implemented to safeguard against or address negative emotional experiences and those aimed at enhancing positive emotional experiences and well-being.
- Psychological self-care is about practices intended to satisfy intellectual needs.
- Spiritual self-care encompasses practices that give meaning to one's life and connect one to the larger world.

Adopting self-care practices can improve individual well-being during stressful events (Luis et al., 2021). Thus, the domains of self-care are important to students as they not only focus on the academic aspect of the first year of study but also how first year students cope with life transitions in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. As suggested by Kickbusch (1989), it is important that self-care practices are understood in terms of the meanings that students attach to their self-care practices across the six domains of self-care and the contexts in which students' self-care practices take place, and the resources available to the students to engage in self-care. The six domains of self-care were therefore appropriate to studying the self-care practices of first-year students during the pandemic.

Methods

Research design

This study was framed within an interpretive paradigm that employs the assumption that meaning in the social world is constructed by individuals engaged in the world they are interpreting (Creswell, 2007). The interpretive view resonates with this study as it facilitates the adequate capture of the students' subjective self-care practices. An exploratory qualitative research design was adopted to capture the self-care practices of first-year students. The focus was on gaining firsthand knowledge of students' self-care practices in their first year of study.

Research setting

The study was conducted at a public university of technology in the KwaZulu-Natal province in South Africa. Since 2015, the university has offered an institutional general education module, which is a compulsory 12-credit module taken by all students in their first year. This module was used as the vehicle for enquiry into students' self-care practices.

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Sampling and participants

A purposive sampling technique was used to select participants. The purposive sampling technique is typically used in qualitative research to identify and select individuals knowledgeable and experienced in a phenomenon of interest (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Criteria for selecting the participants were as follows: first-time entering students and currently registered for the institutional general education module in the academic year 2022. Returning students were excluded from participation in the study.

Data collection and procedures

Qualitative data were collected through the digital storytelling (DST) method. DST is an art-based research method that allows individuals to reflect on their lived experiences, using digital media to convey their narratives (Lambert, 2013). This method involves creating a short video clip, illustrated with photos, participant voices, drawings, and music (Rieger et al., 2018). DST was relevant in this study since data collection occurred remotely under COVID-19 restrictions. Data collection was conducted between March and June 2022, until data saturation was achieved as evidenced by participants providing similar responses. An invitation to participate in the study was sent through the university's notices and students' email accounts. Written instructions and one-on-one sessions through Microsoft (MS) Teams were held with individual participants on basic steps for creating a digital story. The participants were invited to record a short video, not exceeding 10 minutes, depicting the story of their self-care practices using their own devices. They were free to share their narratives in English or any local language and to select visual images or music to bring their stories to life. The use of digital storytelling allowed the participants to work on their own material at their own pace and in their own way. A topic guide contained one broad open-ended question to guide the creation of digital stories: *How do you care for yourself?* In addition, specific sub-questions on how they cared for themselves under each self-care domain were included. Once participants completed creating their digital stories, they were requested to submit them to the research team electronically through email, MS Teams, or WhatsApp.

Data analysis

Thematic data analysis was done using the steps for conducting qualitative data analysis devised by Babchuk (2019). The first step involved assembling materials for analysis by labelling the file of each participant's digital story with a unique number. Thereafter, the digital stories were transcribed verbatim, translated into English where necessary, and managed using NVivo 12. The second step in the analysis was re-familiarization with the dataset by reading through data transcripts in order to delve into the world of the participants as guided by Babchuk (2019). The third step focused on assigning codes to text segments and deriving categories and themes through deductive analysis. A thematic coding framework, informed by the self-care domains, was developed and used for coding the study data, with constant comparison to ensure consistency in coding. The six domains of self-care proposed by Butler et al. (2019) were used as the framework with which to categorise students' self-care practices. Lincoln and Guba's

(1985) guidelines for qualitative research were adopted to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, including memo writing, immersion in the data, and debriefing sessions between the authors to verify the credibility of the analysis and interpretation.

Ethical considerations

The university's research ethics committee granted permission to conduct the study (Reference number 009/22). All participants in the study were provided with a letter of information that outlined the purpose of the study and an electronic consent form for them to sign to participate in the research study. Students were informed that their digital stories, including videos and images, would not be shared as part of protecting their confidentiality and privacy. Identifying information was treated with confidentiality and the qualitative data were anonymized prior to data analysis.

Results

Participant profile

A total of 26 participants (13 females and 13 males) voluntarily participated in the study and submitted their digital stories about their self-care practices. The ages of the participants ranged from 17 and 27 years, with the majority of students aged between 18 and 20 years.

Self-care practices adopted by first-year students

Table 1 summarises the self-care activities adopted by students under each domain of self-care.

Table 1: Participants' self-care practices in each self-care domain

Self-care domain	Self-care practices
Physical	• Adherence to COVID-19 preventative behaviours • Physical exercising • Maintaining personal hygiene • Eating healthy meals and drinking water • Sleeping • Waking up early in the morning
Emotional	• Acknowledging self-worth • Listening to music • Self-motivational pep talks • Practising self-reflection • Expressing feelings to others • Hand reflexology techniques • Forgiving others • Sleeping or napping • Crying • Venting to a trusted friend

Self-care domain	Self-care practices
Spiritual	• Praying • Attending religious services • Spending time alone • Journaling • Meditation • Performing ancestral rituals • Connecting with nature • Keeping the environment clean
Relational	• Writing poems to connect with others • Networking on social media • Taking part in political activities • Collective bulk buying of groceries • Donating personal items to needy students • Smiling to make others feel good • Donating blood
Professional	• Studying at a university • Reaching out to peers for academic support • Debating academic topics • Reading academic books • Following successful people on social media • Searching for information on the internet
Psychological	• Trying new things in life or learning new skills • Reading non-academic materials • Refraining from overusing digital devices • Disconnecting from social media platforms

Note: N=26

Physical self-care

Data collection was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, therefore, participants recounted how they were adhering to the recommended COVID-19 preventative behaviours to promote physical self-care. The measures that participants applied for physical self-care included vaccinating against COVID-19, wearing face masks, washing hands regularly, using hand sanitizers, and keeping physical distance from others.

> *To help myself not to get infected by this virus, I follow all rules and protocols given by the government. If I'm with my friends or in the gym or anywhere where there are two or more people, I keep my 1,5m distance from them while wearing my face mask. To prevent the spread of COVID-19, I normally encourage my friends to take care of themselves because this is a critical time to be safe. Who knows, maybe this pandemic would not be kind to us. So, I rather keep it away from me and stay safe all the time and keep others near me safe too. (P25, Male, 18yrs)*

It was clear that adhering to COVID-19 regulations was not only for personal physical self-care but out of a sense of responsibility for ensuring that surrounding others were protected from infection. Although the COVID-19 regulations seemed to promote

hygiene among students, complying with the university regulations prior to entering university premises was regarded as burdensome:

> *Uploading my COVID-19 vaccination certificate was one of my biggest problems because I didn't know how to upload it. It took me three days to accomplish this requirement. (P6, Male, 19yrs)*

Apart from adhering to COVID-19 preventative measures, the participants mentioned that achieving physical fitness was important for their physical self-care. Physical exercising including playing sports, jogging, walking, and going to the gym were the activities that the participants adopted for taking care of their bodies:

> *I like playing soccer, lifting, and boxing. In fact, I grew up playing soccer in school. As such, during the week, I regularly go to practice at the soccer field for my immune system to remain strong. I am not so much into lifting gym equipment but, occasionally, I do lift when I get a chance. Also, I rarely play boxing sport; however, I enjoy watching it on TV. So, at times, I would go to the gym to learn fighting, punching, and other things related to boxing. (P7, Male, 17yrs)*

The desire for strong immunity combined with an ideal body shape motivated students to engage in physical self-care. Further, maintaining personal hygiene including bathing and keeping their living space clean were also activities adopted by students for physical self-care.

It was also noted that the COVID-19 pandemic shaped self-care activities hence healthy eating and water drinking were also specified as salient means of physical self-care:

> *In line with the COVID-19 pandemic, I eat healthy meals and, regularly, drink more water for my physical self-care. (P11, Female, 20yrs)*

While some participants prioritised healthy meal plans, others, particularly male students, stated challenges associated with eating healthy food:

> *I wasn't the one to prepare food at home. Essentially, I don't know how to cook. I usually eat cornflakes, bread, and also noodles for my breakfast. (P10, Male, 19yrs)*

In this regard, changing home environment and individual skills required for food preparation shaped the choice of unhealthy food that some participants opted to eat and their physical self-care abilities. Another significant aspect of physical self-care that the participants narrated was sleeping, resting, and waking up early in the morning in order to maintain overall well-being:

> *I give myself enough time to sleep as much as my body needs to. I also try not to spend more time resting than studying. It is important to set the time for how many hours I spend sleeping and how many hours I spend studying. I cannot spend most of my time sleeping than studying. I generally do give myself much time to rest. (P4, Female, 22yrs)*

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As reflected in the above excerpt, quality of sleep was characterised by the number of sleep hours. However, sleep deprivation due to academic workload compromised quality of sleep:

> *I'm not good at sleeping. Mostly, I sleep five hours or less because, as new students at the university, we are extremely busy studying. For this reason, I normally study until late hours. (P10, Male, 19yrs)*

The volume of academic workload did not only compromise the participants' quality of sleep, but it was also mentally distressing:

> *I get less time or no time at all to take care of myself mentally and physically for the reason that I'm always stressed and worried about what [academic task] am I going to do next. Obviously, I'm always stressed about submitting all my assignments on time. As a result, I don't often go out anymore…During the day, I'm always in front of my [computer] keyboard working on my assignments. (P13, Male, 21yrs)*

Although participants recognised the need for and importance of engaging in physical self-care, the academic workload hindered effective self-care for first-year students.

Emotional self-care

Participants described a range of activities through which they practiced emotional self-care. First, acknowledging self-worth was featured in the participants' digital stories when they described the value that they placed on themselves and their emotional well-being. They stated the importance of prioritising their feelings and emotions to be able to relate with peers. Second, participants also strongly believed that listening to music played an integral role in their emotional self-care to counter negative and difficult experiences in their first year of study:

> *I usually listen to music whenever I'm angry or whenever something breaks my heart. Listening to music helps me the most. Music calms me down whenever I'm not okay. (P2, Female, 17yrs)*

Music played a role in improving feeling good and functioning well under the difficult circumstances of being a first-year student:

> *When I listen to music – it's so nice that it just blocks out the world as if nothing is going on except me at that moment. So, things like that usually help me to recoup and prepare myself for the week or the day before me so that I can come back relaxed with a stress-free mind. (P8, Female, 19yrs)*

Third, self-motivational pep talks were employed as a strategy to address negative emotional experiences that were associated with being a first-year student:

> *I do however remain calm and give myself some motivational pep talks to start my day off – just to know I can handle the university life and convince myself that everything will be all right. (P8, Female, 19yrs)*

Lastly, various other emotional self-care activities participants reported included (a) practising self-reflection as a way of monitoring how they felt about their journey of first-year study or negative experience; (b) expressing feelings to others to ensure that others around them were aware of their emotions; (c) hand reflexology techniques to release tension; (d) forgiving others who may have hurt them instead of holding a grudge; (e) sleeping or napping to overcome fatigue or cope with emotional distress; (f) crying as a way of releasing negative emotions; and (g) venting to a trusted friend in order to share traumatic or distressing experiences.

Spiritual self-care

The participants listed several spiritual self-care practices to ignite their inner spirit. These included praying and attending religious services. Although these practices were for students' spiritual self-care, it was clear that they were also enabling a successful transition to young adulthood and independent living:

> *I'm a dedicated Christian. As a result, I enjoy and like being in church for my spiritual revival. When I'm in church, I learn a lot from other congregants. They advise me on how to behave as a young woman at university who is no longer staying at home with her parents. Their teachings are helpful for me to stay safe and grow spiritually while studying at the university. (P12, Female, 18yrs)*

Additionally, some participants talked about spending time alone, journaling, and meditation as the activities that they adopted for spiritual self-care. Others, particularly male students, mentioned connecting with ancestors through performing ancestral rituals for personal and cultural reasons as a form of spiritual self-care:

> *My family believes a lot in ancestors hence I also believe in ancestors. At home, we regularly perform ancestral rituals to communicate with our ancestors. So, anytime I need spiritual help, I would simply reach out to my ancestors and things get resolved. My ancestors are our deceased family members who look after me as an alive human being on earth. They definitely play a huge role in my life and the person I am. (P7, Male, 17yrs)*

As reflected in the above excerpt, spiritual self-care practices were interwoven with the aspect of students' personal identities in terms of how they viewed themselves and their values. Moreover, students' spiritual self-care practices also encompassed much more than religious and cultural activities. Connecting with nature was regarded as a form of spiritual self-care. They mentioned activities such as taking a walk in the surroundings of a natural environment, planting vegetables and flowers, and looking after cows:

> *At home, we have domestic cows and agricultural plantations. Whenever I go home on weekends, I ensure that I engage in farming at our agricultural plantations and take time to look after our domestic cows. Domestic cows are very important to me because they are also our source of family income. Sometimes, my family would sell cows to get money for food and other basic needs. (P7, Male, 17yrs)*

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Looking after the cows was not only for spiritual self-care but it also facilitated means of livelihood for securing financial resources. Furthermore, keeping the environment clean was another way of engaging in spiritual self-care:

> *I respect nature as much as I respect myself. I do that by avoiding polluting water as it can kill the water ecosystem. It is my belief that plants and animals need to be taken care of as much as humans. (P4, Female, 22yrs)*

The participants viewed themselves as co-existing and connected to the natural environment and this perception shaped their spiritual self-care practices.

Relational self-care

With respect to relational self-care, writing poems and networking on social media were stated as practices that some participants adopted for reaching out to and impacting the lives of others:

> *I am also poetic and use poems to connect with other students. Other students are very happy to learn from my thoughts and ideas, which I express in poetry. Naturally, I am an outspoken person. As such, I get satisfaction from positively influencing other students. (P9, Male, 19yrs)*

Poetry and social media were tools that the participants used to create connections with others and to ideologically influence their social networks. One participant explained that poetry was a form of entertainment to help others to overcome isolation and loneliness at the university. Additionally, taking part in political activities was regarded as a way of changing society and the lives of others:

> *As a young person, I participate in voting for student leaders within the university and political leaders in government. Also, I educate myself about the political landscape in my country through interacting with other students. (P4, Female, 22yrs)*

The participants also mentioned that they tapped into the power of collective bulk buying of groceries by clubbing together with friends on campus as a means of relational self-care. While collective buying of groceries involved budgeting and saving to afford to buy in bulk, the lack of skills in handling money was a concern expressed by male students.

> *Recently, we received large payments of funding aid allowance. As I speak, right now, I don't have even a cent! (P9, Male, 19yrs)*

Unnecessary spending on non-essential items left students with no money and distressed:

> *As soon as you get the money you get confused about what you wanted and what you see and you end up buying unnecessary things which will then give you stress. (P25, Male, 18yrs)*

Competition and owning luxury items were pointed out as driving unnecessary spending among students:

> *I make sure that I save money, at least a certain amount per month so that it can help me when I need help in the future or during emergencies. I am finding it important that I don't compete with other university students but be myself because we come from different backgrounds. (P4, Female, 22yrs)*

The inability to handle personal finances was indeed emotionally distressing for the participants and it compromised their well-being. Participants expressed an interest in financial literacy education for first-year students:

> *Of all the problems that I have in the world is that I'm unable to handle money. Even at home, they usually warn me that I would not be able to buy a house with the way I spend money. I would be happy to participate in a financial literacy programme so that I learn to save money since I can see that I have a problem with saving money. (P7, Male, 17yrs)*

Furthermore, it was noted that donating personal items to needy students was an effort that the participants made to maintain and enhance interpersonal connections with others:

> *If other people don't have what they need, I rather give them my own things. I just cannot take it to see another person in need, that's why I simply give them my things. The reason I give them my things is that I want them not to feel alone in the problem. (P9, Male, 19yrs)*

Apart from donating supplies to needy students, one participant mentioned donating blood as an important contribution to society:

> *For me, I donate blood since I'm now over 18 years old and legally qualified to be a blood donor. It gives me joy to donate blood for the sake of saving the lives of other people. (P4, Female, 22yrs)*

Donating blood was not only a form of relational self-care to save lives but considered an affirmation of young adulthood.

Lastly, smiling to make others feel good was how both male and female students maintained social networks with others for relational self-care, as illustrated:

> *Smiling is one of the ways I connect with people. I always smile and confront others with a smile so that it would be easier for them to talk to me, feel comfortable around me, and open up to me. (P4, Female, 22yrs)*

Smiling to make others feel good was not only important for students to foster relationships in a new university environment but also for dealing with isolation and loneliness during the first year of university.

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Professional self-care

First, the digital stories revealed that the participants typically viewed studying at a university as a means of professional self-care considering that they would be acquiring academic knowledge and skills to facilitate success in society. Gaining admission to university while many other young people did not get the opportunity to study boosted their self-esteem and self-perceptions that they would become a generation of successful young people:

> *The fact that I am studying at the university is my contribution to the world so that it becomes a better place to live in. (P7, Male, 17yrs)*

Second, reading academic books and studying in the library were stated as part of professional self-care in relation to academic success:

> *I like reading a lot; not novels. I read challenging materials. By that I mean, something that would make me curious for more information. It is for this reason that after completing Grade 12 I chose to come to the university to get challenged academically. (P7, Male, 17yrs)*

Third, reaching out to peers for academic support and searching for information on the internet were additional strategies that participants employed to mitigate academic-related stressors and promote their professional self-care:

> *I like searching for information on Google. I also reach out to my classmates to explain concepts and topics that I did not understand in class, then they would explain them to me. (P12, Female, 18yrs)*

Another participant stated:

> *I help other students who are struggling with digital connections. It could be Moodle or MS TEAMS so that they can join online classes. By so doing, it advances my academic and digital skills. (P10, Male, 19yrs)*

Last but not least, debating academic topics and concepts with a view of developing critical thinking and reflection skills was stated as necessary for university and professional self-care:

> *Often, I debate with others a lot on academic topics since I believe it improves my thinking skills and those that I interact with. (P4, Female, 22yrs)*

Finally, following successful people on social media inspired the participants to thrive for success within the university environment:

> *I follow successful people on social media who are in the same field of study as mine in order to learn how they did it in life or how they got where they are. It really motivates me and helps me to gain knowledge and skills in order to know how to do those sorts of things. It also helps me to be able to do the same and gain skills so that others can learn from me. (P25, Male, 18yrs)*

This also reflects that social media presence supported the students in acquiring information while establishing wide networks.

Psychological self-care

To satisfy their personal intellectual needs and expand their knowledge and skills, the participants mentioned trying new things in life or learning new skills, listening to podcasts, and reading novels and newspapers:

> *I'm not scared to try new things which I never knew before. For example, I didn't how to do a digital story; however, I told myself 'let me just do it' to pick up a new skill. (P9, Male, 19yrs)*

While social media and technological devices were popular among the participants, some mentioned that they occasionally refrained from using digital devices and disconnected from social media platforms to promote optimal psychological self-care.

Discussion

This study shows that first-year students engage in a range of self-care practices across the six domains of self-care. In their first year of study, students incorporate self-care values to enhance health and well-being. However, self-care does not appear as an individual act, rather it is a collective product that emerges from the interactions between the individual first-year students and others.

The study findings reveal that student access to higher education is regarded as a means of self-care and a tool to access future employment. These findings are not surprising considering that many students are first-generation and come from poor households in South Africa (Naidoo & Cartwright, 2020). Pather et al. (2017) explain that access to higher education has resulted in an increased representation of students from low-income households, who are often first-generation students. Moreover, the findings from this study highlight that universities are critical spaces in which first-year students apply self-care practices in order to shape themselves into responsible citizens. Donating blood and participating in political activities indicate that students are conscious of the roles that they can play in society for social justice and community-building. It could be perceived as affirmation that they have reached young adulthood. Furthermore, the findings of this study show that students care for their peers. This was evidenced by their donation of personal items to needy students as a form of self-care. Helping others served the purpose of relational self-care.

It was evident from this study that connecting with others promoted students' sense of belonging and connectedness to the university, thus enhancing their self-care. The findings of this study revealed that connecting with others in the university was important for first-year students to develop relationship skills. We found that relational self-care was the most fundamental domain that underpinned first-year students' well-being. As explained by Veksler and Meyer (2014), young adulthood facilitates opportunities for navigating interpersonal relationships with peers. Subsequently, the pandemic limited physical human interaction, thus students fostered self-care activities

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that supported social connectedness in each domain of self-care. For example, while students sought to enhance their professional self-care by reaching out to their peers for academic support, this also addressed their relational self-care needs. These findings align with Mntuyedwa's (2023) study, which holds that social integration is crucial to first-year student well-being.

As in the studies of Labbe et al. (2007) and Vidas et al. (2021), participant students listened to music to reduce the negative emotional effects of stress, anger, anxiety, and to cope with stress. For example, a study among first-year students in Australia reported that music listening was rated as the most effective strategy for managing COVID-19 stress (Vidas et al., 2021) This can be explained by the fact that music plays an important role in youth culture to claim cultural space in public and at home, to explore and establish identities, and for positive mental health (Papinczak et al., 2015). In Papinczak et al. (2015) young people listen to music to modify undesirable emotions as a coping strategy through which well-being is restored. The excess of music genres available to music listeners on the internet has popularised incorporating music into students' self-care practices. However, the intensity or volume of the music played can also have a negative effect on the well-being of the music listeners and those around them. A study conducted by Dolegui (2013) indicated that loud music is a stronger distractor and obstructs cognitive performance. Our study did not generate data on the intensity and the type of music that students listened to, and this aspect may need further investigation.

While collective purchasing of groceries enhanced students' relational self-care, a lack of experience in handling money comprised students' emotional well-being, and it could also compromise their academic success. These findings corroborate those of Mngomezulu et al. (2017), that inexperience in money handling, excitement at accessing money for the first time, difficulties of not knowing what to do with the money, and a lack of budgeting skills contribute to students' misuse of funds which in turn can result in poor academic performance. Poor financial literacy in first-year students may lead to a cycle of debt before they complete their studies and are absorbed into employment. While financial support facilitates access to higher education for students from low-income families, the lack of financial skills could compromise their academic success and self-care when they are distressed by mishandling the allowances given to them and the need to compete with others.

Further, it should not be assumed that students assume the responsibility of self-care with the insight or skills required to implement healthy self-care practices or that they use available resources for self-care. Previous studies have reported that university students adopt ineffective self-care and coping strategies, and struggle to access support services that could help them in managing challenges (Mudhovozi, 2011; Naidoo et al., 2014). Consistent with the literature, our study found that none of the students mentioned using available student counselling support services within the university to enhance their self-care. It is possible that first-year students are not aware of the counselling support services or they rely on other healing systems, for example, spiritual healing systems that are either religious or indigenous. According to Musakwa et al.

(2021), the lack of sufficient information/poor health literacy was one of the barriers to accessing health services among first-year students in South Africa. Another South African study also found very low mental healthcare treatment utilisation among first-year university students (Bantjes et al., 2020). Naidoo and Cartwright (2020) recommend that student counselling services be transformed in a manner that promotes holistic student well-being. For example, counselling services could integrate multiple forms of healing systems that students can use to promote health and well-being.

Our findings further indicate that some students did not engage in healthy self-care practices. This was evident in that they mentioned practising harmful self-care practices (e.g. oversleeping and eating unhealthy foods). These findings are worrying given that such harmful practices could also risk academic performance for first-year students. The finding nevertheless needs to be taken seriously because the relationship between psychological stress and academic performance (Naidoo et al., 2014) indicates a potential risk for first-year students dropping out of their studies due to adopting unhealthy self-care practices. Students should, therefore, be assisted in developing effective self-care practices to deal with stress in constructive ways.

While self-care courses are being implemented, evaluated, and adapted as part of existing curricula in various developed countries, South African universities currently lag behind compared with efforts elsewhere in the self-care curriculum for students. There is a need to infuse self-care into the first-year curriculum. The self-care course could introduce students to many other tools of self-care that they could use in order to enhance their well-being. Effective self-care in first-year of study requires both the engagement of students as well as the support of the higher education system.

Conclusion

This study investigated and gained insight into self-care practices adopted by first-year students at a university of technology in South Africa in the context of COVID-19. It is evident that first-year students' self-care practices and relational self-care are intertwined in each domain of self-care. Thus, social involvement and engagement are fundamental principles that should be emphasised in designing self-care interventions for first-year students. While self-care is important for enhancing well-being, unhealthy self-care practices can threaten students' well-being and possibly academic success. Student affairs and services need to design harm prevention interventions and curricula to support adequate self-care and sustainable healthy behaviours. Future studies can develop a self-care inventory to identify students at risk of poor self-care and design targeted interventions to promote self-care.

Strengths and limitations

This study offers a noteworthy contribution to the field of health promotion. It has addressed a primarily overlooked area of student self-care in the Southern African literature and adopted a student-centred approach to supporting the voice of students in informing intervention development within the higher education context. Additionally, this study is important for the African context because it takes the aspects of self-care

beyond most western literature and makes local practices of self-care significant. Several limitations of this study, including poor internet connectivity, quality of digital stories, and participants' limited technological skills, are already discussed in our published work (Gumede & Sibiya, 2023). Earlier, we also highlighted the strategies that we adopted to address the limitations including that the participants were afforded flexible timelines to create the digital stories and were provided with one-on-one guidance on how to create them.

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Ethics statement

Permission to conduct this study was granted by the case university's research ethics committee (Reference number 009/22). All ethics protocols were followed by the researchers.

Potential conflict of interest

None.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Graduate transitions in Africa: Understanding strategies of livelihood generation for universities to better support students

La transition des diplômés en Afrique : Comprendre les stratégies de création de moyens de subsistance pour que les universités soutiennent mieux les étudiants

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ABSTRACT

Graduate transitions and pathways do not naturally involve moving smoothly or sequentially from education into the world of work. Instead university graduates move through employment, entrepreneurship, unemployment and continued further education as they generate livelihoods. For African universities to be student-centred, with a focus on student development and success, the nature of these livelihood pathways must be examined in order to provide appropriate and relevant training and transition support. This article uses quantitative and qualitative data from African graduates who received a scholarship to complete their degrees at 21 universities (nine in Africa and 12 from other countries). Their post-graduation pathways are mapped and explored to determine how graduates generate livelihoods. The findings show that a minority of African graduates move smoothly from education into employment, and that for the majority, pathways are multidimensional and complex. While some move into the world of work with ease, most develop portfolios of income. By developing initiatives based on these findings, universities can help graduates navigate the challenges of income diversification, provide them with the necessary skills and resources, and foster a supportive ecosystem that encourages entrepreneurial thinking and diversified career paths.

KEYWORDS

Graduate transitions, livelihood transitions, student transitions, transition support, engaged university, labour market pathways

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RÉSUMÉ

La transition et le cheminement des diplômés ne consistent pas à passer naturellement et de manière fluide ou séquentielle des études au monde du travail. Au contraire, les diplômés d'universités peuvent traverser des périodes d'emploi, d'entreprenariat, de chômage et de formation continue, tout en générant des moyens de subsistance. Pour que les universités africaines soient centrées sur l'étudiant, et qu'elles mettent l'accent sur son développement et sa réussite, la nature de ces parcours de vie doit être examinée afin de fournir une formation et un soutien adaptés et adéquats au cours desdits parcours. Cet article se base sur des données quantitatives et qualitatives concernant des étudiants africains qui ont reçu une bourse pour poursuivre leurs études et obtenir un diplôme dans 21 universités (neuf en Afrique et 12 dans d'autres pays). Leurs parcours après l'obtention du diplôme ont été cartographiés et analysés pour déterminer comment les diplômés génèrent des moyens de subsistance. Les résultats montrent qu'une minorité de diplômés africains passent aisément de leurs études à l'emploi, et que pour la majorité d'entre eux, les parcours sont multidimensionnels et complexes. Alors que certains s'insèrent facilement dans le monde du travail, la plupart développent des activités génératrices de revenus. Les universités peuvent aider les diplômés à relever les défis de la diversification des sources de revenus en développant des initiatives basées sur ces conclusions, en fournissant aux étudiants les compétences et les ressources nécessaires et en favorisant un écosystème propice à l'esprit d'entreprise et à la diversification des parcours professionnels.

MOTS-CLÉS

Transitions des diplômés, transitions de subsistance, transitions des étudiants, soutien à la transition, université engagée, parcours sur le marché du travail

Introduction

The African continent presents a complex landscape of challenges, encompassing issues like poverty, discrimination, poor educational achievement, and limited employment prospects (Cerf, 2018). Generalising about the prevalence of these challenges can be limiting, but making comparisons within and beyond the continent can provide valuable insights into the post-university experiences of graduates.

Notably, in Africa, the youth population, defined as individuals aged 15–24, constitutes more than a third of the working-age population, in contrast to the global figure of less than a quarter (International Labour Organisation, 2020). This demographic 'youth bulge' has led to an abundant labour force supply, intensifying competition for job opportunities in a challenging job market (Haider, 2016). Barriers to employment for African youth include unstable or shrinking economies; neglect of employment as a core component of the development agenda; employer perceptions, lack of entry-level jobs; inadequate education, skills, and work experience; limited labour market experience, weak networking, a lack of social capital; limited financial resources to effectively pursue employment opportunities and digitisation (Baah-Boateng, 2014). The lack of available and desirable employment therefore means that African youth, including some graduates, are forced to make a living through improvised forms of survivalism rather than secure wage work (Honwana, 2014; Thieme, 2018).

This situation is common in Africa and the Global South more broadly, as youth livelihoods are frequently characterised by precarity, informality, waiting, hustling, improvisation, survivalism and *kukiya-kiya* (a Shona term translating to 'like a key unpicking a lock' denoting survival strategies) (Kabonga, 2020; Thieme, 2018).

While two-thirds of non-agricultural workers in Africa earn a living in the informal sector and rates of graduate unemployment are certainly increasing, what is also clear is that intersecting processes of globalization, economic restructuring, diversification and informalisation have blurred the lines between formal and informal, skilled and unskilled work (Meagher et al., 2016). This has functioned to create new categories of labourers, including graduate micro-entrepreneurs, formal firms employing informal workers, and instances of modern bonded labour, with some scholars saying that binaries like formal-informal do not help in understanding how labour is being transformed under globalization (Meagher et al., 2016). What is clear is that graduate paths are full of continuities and discontinuities (Wood, 2017) over periods spanning several years, which have "u-turns", "detours", and "zigzags" (Schoon & Lyons-Amos, 2016, p. 14). In these pathways graduates may continue their studies, find employment, experience un- or underemployment, start businesses, or travel.

Youth in Africa regularly rely on innovative forms of improvisation, characterised as "the hustle" by Thieme (2018). They draw extensively on opportunistic practices that lie beyond formal institutional support. One way the pathways model has been adapted can be seen in the work of Schoon and Lyons-Amos (2016) who recognised the nonlinearity of youth transitions in the diverse pathways that they take into adulthood. Using data from two five-year cohorts born in the 1980s in the United Kingdom (UK), Schoon and Lyons-Amos (2016) identify five main pathways young people take out of school: continuous studies, finding employment straight after school and staying in it; studying after school and then moving into employment; long periods of unemployment; and long periods of economic inactivity (Schoon & Lyons-Amos, 2016). This diverse pathway framework (albeit not this particular model, which is specific to the UK context) has been validated in urban Bulawayo (Mhazo & Thebe, 2020), in peri-urban Cape Town (Webb, 2021), in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa (Rogan & Reynolds, 2016); in rural Kenya (Mwaura, 2017) and across a range of developing country contexts (Juárez & Gayet, 2014). It is an important contribution to the literature because it shows how those grouped together at a certain point (up to lower secondary school in this case) branch off into different types of life courses.

In the Global South, entrepreneurship tends to be promoted as a panacea for poverty and youth unemployment (Ngwenya & Mashau, 2019). In the literature, a distinction tends to be made between necessity and opportunity entrepreneurs (Bayart & Saleilles, 2019; Fairlie & Fossen, 2017). Necessity entrepreneurs are usually driven by the need for economic survival resulting from unemployment, while opportunity entrepreneurs identify and seize business opportunities (Fairlie & Fossen, 2017). In addition, a new category found recently in the literature is that of programme-induced entrepreneurs. These are entrepreneurs who are inspired by programmes that offer entrepreneurship training and/or start-up funds (Mgumia, 2017). Regardless of the reason for starting a business, more needs to be known about how universities can better prepare students and graduates for future entrepreneurial activities.

In addition to the sheer plurality and variety of livelihood strategies people pursue, a second reality is the multiplicity and simultaneity of livelihood-making approaches.

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People rely on several strategies across their lifetimes, while many pursue multiple strategies at the same time or rapidly jump between activities on a day-to-day basis (Kangondo et al., 2023). Capturing both the dissimilarity and interrelatedness of livelihood strategies is therefore imperative.

This article heeds the call by Cooper et al. (2019) to situate youth studies in the Global South. It problematises the transitions paradigm by becoming 'entangled in local realities' across Africa, in the belief that studying "contexts where youth have had to adapt, hustle and survive in precarious conditions for an extended period of time might demonstrate something unique about the human condition" (Cooper et al., 2019, p. 41).

Given this context, it is crucial for African universities to prepare students and support graduates to navigate the realities of generating livelihoods. The type of support offered must be informed by evidence. To this end, this article extends the current body of literature by using qualitative and quantitative panel data from graduates situated in a number of countries to answer the following research questions:

1. What pathways do young African graduates take to generate livelihoods?
2. How do these graduates generate livelihoods?

Understanding the post-university transitions of graduates is essential for universities to fulfil their educational missions, support their students, and adapt to the evolving needs of society. It contributes to enabling universities to remain relevant, effective, and responsive to the challenges and opportunities faced by their alumni.

Drawing on the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework and notions of navigational capacity as conceptual frameworks, qualitive and quantitative data from a larger study is analysed to answer these questions. Using the findings, we propose lessons that universities can employ to inform appropriate graduate support interventions.

Conceptual framework

The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework is a conceptual framework that provides a holistic approach to understanding and analysing the various factors that influence people's livelihoods, particularly in the context of poverty reduction and sustainable development (Natarajan et al., 2022). The framework recognises that people's livelihoods are influenced by a complex web of interconnected factors, including social, economic, environmental, and institutional dimensions (Tabares et al., 2022). It seeks to understand the interrelationships among these dimensions and their impact on people's well-being and ability to sustain a decent standard of living over time. Key components of this framework are the use of assets or capitals and devising livelihood strategies. Assets refer to the resources and capabilities that individuals and households possess, which can be classified into five categories: natural, physical, human, financial, and social. Assets form the basis for people's livelihood strategies and their ability to cope with shocks and stresses (Tabares et al., 2022). Livelihood strategies are the diverse activities and choices people make to earn a living and sustain their livelihoods.

Livelihood strategies can include agricultural activities, wage labour, self-employment, migration, and access to social safety nets (Alobo Loison, 2015).

The notion of navigational capacities usefully illuminates how people negotiate their social contexts in order to generate livelihoods, with navigators and their environments symbiotically entwined, challenging individualistic interpretations of how young people overcome adversity as a component of their evolving environments (Appadurai, 2004; Swartz, 2021). The social notion of a capacity – unlike a capability, which refers to the individual repertoire of actions people perform – refers to future-orientated abilities and dispositions that are used in relation to others and which may be deployed for social change (Swartz, 2021). Navigational capacities are forged in context, through practices, pathways, and future-orientated aspirations, acknowledging that young people in adversity possess the potential to change their evolving environments (Swartz, 2021). Thus, livelihood is a multi-dimensional concept, stemming from the capacities people have, what people do and what they accomplish by doing it.

Methodology

The data for this article were taken from a large 5-year study called The Imprint of Education. The study, conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council, is in its fourth year. Quantitative and qualitative data are used to answer the research questions.

The quantitative data are from graduates who were born in Africa (N=544), and who studied at 21 universities (nine in Africa and 12 from other countries). These graduates completed their studies, funded by scholarships, between 2017 and 2020. Most of the graduates (78%) lived in an African country (18 countries in total), whilst the rest lived outside the continent. Respondents were surveyed in 2020 and again in 2022. Data were collected through call centres and online platforms. The data collection company had call centres in all countries of interest. This ensured that data collectors spoke the local language(s) and had local knowledge to enable us to capture the respondents' answers faithfully. The questions from the questionnaire relevant to this article regarded the labour market positions that respondents occupied. For each labour market position, further questions were asked in order to drill down into and examine the nature of it.

The panel data collected provide information on education and labour market pathways and the factors that shape these pathways. Descriptive and transition matrix analysis was conducted using Stata software (version 17). Markov Chain transition matrices were used to explore pathways and transitions by determining the proportion of individuals who moved from one state of economic activity into another state or out of it in the following period (Zannella et al., 2019). Panel data from the 2020 and 2022 surveys was used to create transition matrices. Each transition matric cell represents a probability where:

$$Pij=n_{ij}/n_i \quad (1)$$

Where pij is the probability of respondents who moved from initial economic status i into a final economic status j for I =1..,N and j =1,....., N. The term nij is the number of respondents who were in the economic status i and moved to economic status j between

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period t and $t+1$ and n is the number of respondents who were in state i in period t. A categorical variable for economic activities was constructed from four dummy variables (paid employment, studying, unemployed, business ownership). The 'unemployed' are those who are not in employment, not studying, not in entrepreneurship but looking for a job.

Qualitative data were obtained from individual in-depth interviews with graduates from the same institutions as the quantitative sample. Across the years, 122 were interviewed in 2020, 117 in 2021 and 106 in 2022. These interviewees also participated in the quantitative survey. Interviewees were asked about their lives and livelihoods.

Clarke and Braun's (2013) thematic data analysis process was followed to analyse the interview transcripts. This process provided a structured and systematic approach to qualitative data analysis, helping researchers uncover meaningful insights from their data and ensuring the rigour and transparency of their research findings. The analysis was conducted by a group of eight researchers under the direction of the co-principal investigator of the study. The process involved researchers immersing themselves in the data by reading and re-reading the collected material to become familiar with the content, identifying key themes and patterns that emerged. Next the transcripts were coded using Atlas.ti (version 8) software, which involves labelling or categorising segments of data based on content. Building on the initial codes, broader themes or patterns within the data were identified. These themes were reviewed, refined and defined, providing clear and concise descriptions of each theme, supported by relevant examples from the data. An anonymised report, using pseudonyms and country of residence as identifiers for interviewees, was generated for each theme.

Ethical clearance for the larger study was obtained through the Human Sciences Research Council's Research Ethics Committee, protocol number REC 6/19/06/19.

Limitation

A limitation of this study is that the sample of graduates is small and cannot be generalised to the population of graduates or scholarship recipients in Africa. The findings of this study are, rather, indicative of the African graduate experience. However, the use of qualitative and quantitative panel data provides the opportunity to explore graduate transitions broadly and deeply, across three years, on a cross-country scale, whereas other studies generally only use one type of methodology.

Findings

The findings are divided into two main sections, each of which answers one of the research questions.

What pathways do young African graduates take to generate livelihoods?

The labour market positions of the respondents were disaggregated into discrete categories to determine what they were doing in 2020 and 2022. Figure 1 illustrates that most respondents occupied a single position across the years (working only, studying only, entrepreneur only or unemployed). However, the ability of some young people

to act by taking opportunities for livelihood generation is evident as a combined 41% in 2020 and 46% in 2022 occupied more than one position. Across the data collection points, about a fifth of the respondents supplemented income from employment with entrepreneurship activities.

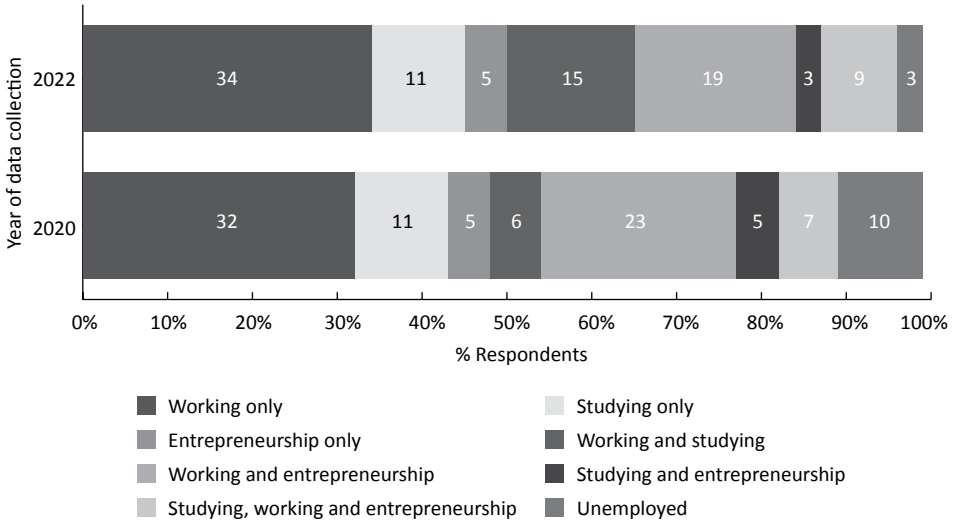

Figure 1: Discrete labour market positions of graduates

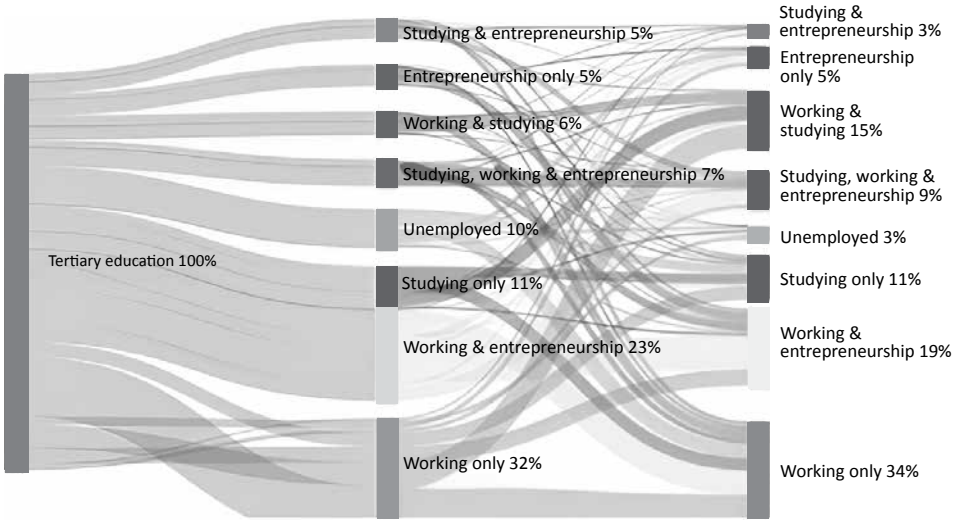

Figure 2: Discrete labour market positions of graduates

Source: Authors' calculations from Wave 1 and 3 data from the TIE Alumni Tracer Study

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Examining the labour market positions in Figure 1 does not provide a full picture of graduate paths. The movements between these discrete position must also be explored. This was done through a transitions matrix analysis of the data. The results of the analysis are illustrated in Figure 2. Using the results, we mapped how the graduates moved (or did not move) from one discrete labour market position to another. The thickness of the bars in the diagrams below is proportional to the number of respondents who followed a particular pathway.

Figure 1 illustrates that while a third of the respondents in the survey were solely working in 2020 and 2022, only 16% of the total sample moved smoothly from tertiary education into a job and remained in employment (illustrated by the green band across the bottom of the graph). Among graduates who were exclusively employed in 2020, about a third continued working while also pursuing further studies or engaging in entrepreneurial ventures. A smaller portion of graduates opted for full-time studies, entrepreneurship, and 11% of those who were solely employed in 2020 reported unemployment in 2022.

The graduates in this study were engaged in entrepreneurial activities as part of broader livelihood strategies, under which multiple income streams were sourced while education activities also were undertaken. In 2022, more than a third of the graduates continued to work while simultaneously running their own business ventures. Among graduates who were employed and engaged in business ventures, some reported simultaneously studying, working, and being entrepreneurs in 2022. Half of the graduates who had not secured employment after graduating were now actively employed, with some having embarked on entrepreneurial ventures, while others had resumed their studies. Remarkably, only a few graduates remained without employment in 2022.

How do these graduates generate livelihoods?

Four livelihood generating strategies emerged from the data: having multiple streams of income, self-generated income, further education as an income source and getting a foot in the door. These are discussed in turn.

Multiple streams of income

While the survey questions on the nature of employment were on the main job[1] graduates had, it did ask how many jobs employed respondents had. In 2020 88% of respondents had one job only, this dropped slightly to 84% in 2022, meaning that three in 20 graduates hold multiple jobs. A quarter of those who were employed, had full-time appointments. Indicating a need or opportunity for other income generating opportunities.

Having a minimum of two significant sources of income and an educational activity characterised 21 graduates interviewed in the qualitative component of this study. Common income streams in this category included those who have a passion for farming

1 'Main job' was defined as where the alumnus spends most of their time, not where they earn most of their income.

and have managed to cultivate livestock and crops in rural areas alongside income generation through wage labour. For others this included side businesses that they started by selling a range of commodities or an NGO/social enterprise that they pursue for philanthropical purposes, but which also has material benefits. Some described multiple income streams as part of an ongoing approach to livelihood generation:

> *…They (employer) always encourage us to go back to school and upgrade and so on … I think I've grown in terms of my projects, even in my job. I'm also going back to school very soon, but I will just be doing it through online school, but I'm just going to grow in terms of my enterprises, my projects at home, my family is growing. Yes, and my experience at work as well, we are growing. (Ezra, Uganda, 2022)*

Ezra described his "enterprises and projects at home" forming part of an overall life strategy that included formal salaried work, operating alongside continually returning to improve his educational qualifications, as well as family responsibilities. Rather than a linear pathway from education into the world of work, Ezra described a pathway with multiple components intersecting simultaneously, part of a lifelong journey that develops on many fronts and in different contexts. A number of graduates mentioned rural, agricultural ventures as integral to their multiple income streams:

> *I am farming food. Maize, potatoes, tomatoes. I'm doing that, and also thanks to [my scholarship], my pocket money during school, I saved it all up and I bought myself a piece of land. (Jemima, Uganda, 2022)*

Some interviewees diligently and frugally saved their stipend during their studies or their salaries after graduation, acquiring land that enabled them to grow, produce and sometimes keep livestock. These kinds of ventures found varying levels of success. For some, side-hustles contributed to helping support family in their livelihood endeavours:

> *I managed to save and get myself a piece of land which I hope, I plan to build a house there. For now, I'm building a house for my dad which is good. So, there is progress. (Lucia, Uganda, 2022)*

Purchasing land was one way graduates demonstrated their gratitude to kin for helping to raise them, but it also enabled graduates to express their successful transition into adulthood. Lucia described this as "progress" above, demonstrating how this act of personal success symbolised development along her pathway. For others, the act of acquiring the asset of land and building a house demonstrated forms of personhood:

> *… after I got a job, I got a salary bump and sometimes you need to invest in something. I bought some land … I need to build a house in the village. Here in Kenya, ... if you don't have a house in the village, you are not a person. (Solomon, Kenya, 2022)*

Solomon described purchasing land as enhancing his sense of identity and connectedness to family and friends, who formed part of his personal history. In periods of crisis, like during the COVID-19 pandemic, people like Solomon frequently returned to their rural base and resorted to subsistence living, a form of insurance in times of need. Others

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expressed that they intended to retire on these plots of purchased land, illustrating how this strategy formed part of social insurance in contexts where state-provided security, like healthcare and pensions, is limited. Some graduates preferred using urban or online ventures to generate multiple income-streams:

> *I want to … build an income stream that is outside my normal job … I started trading in stocks. (Joseph, Diaspora, 2022)*

> *I'm doing bags online because I want to have a store in the city … Side hustle. [I sell] Mostly on WhatsApp … I have my middle person, because I go downtown, someone who can sell to me at a relatively low price. (Judith, Uganda, 2022)*

Joseph and Judith mentioned investing in the stock market or commodities like handbags, activities that offer different kinds of risks and require other capitals in comparison to the rural ventures mentioned previously. For Judith, her networks and social capital, including socialisation in middle-class tastes and fashions, enabled her to purchase goods wholesale from someone in a local market and sell them in a different market online. One alumnus opened a game shop after he lost his job due to the pandemic, describing it in the following way:

> *… I was able to raise my first capital to start a shop. So that's where I started the shop from, it came from my interest of movies, I actually love. And then it's IT related because everything there is more of engineering, and I took computer engineering in my undergraduate so everything I was doing at the shop is all related to my degree. So, it's more of my hobby, it was work, but more of a hobby because I love movies, I like interacting with IT stuff. (Archie, Kenya, 2022)*

Archie's shop provided a recreational space for young people to play computer games and it doubled up as an internet café where he gave youth career advice and helped elderly people access documentation needed to secure government assistance. He was able to integrate his training as a computer engineer into a viable business venture that combined work with his interests, while also giving back to his community through service.

Therefore, many graduates worked in a salaried position, studied on the side and were involved in rural or urban forms of income generation to buttress their income, support kin and establish forms of social security for themselves for the future.

Furthering education as an income source

Scholarships act as a means of accessing education opportunities but also as a livelihood. While in both years of data collection, two thirds of graduates in the study relied on their jobs as their main sources of income, 14% in 2020 and 13% in 2022 relied on scholarships. Some of the interviewed graduates have pursued two or three master's degrees to access an income or have indicated that they wished to pursue a PhD because of material benefits. The pressure of supporting families means that some graduates

look to the education sector, postgraduate degrees in particular, to generate income and provide for their families. Salma used her educational path to secure income abroad:

> *My plan for the next six years … is well laid out … finish my Masters this year. Work for eight months. Then … I will do a PhD for four years, then … a post- doc for two years, so at least I'll have that. (Salma, Diaspora, 2021)*

The theory of navigational capacities shows how people negotiate multiple, connected social contexts (Appadurai, 2004; Swartz, 2021). In this case, navigation involves creating symbiotically entwined environments to overcome adversity through using the most potent capitals in these young people's armoury, namely their academic capabilities.

Self-generated income

Respondents engaged in entrepreneurial activities as part of broader livelihood strategies, under which multiple income streams were sourced while education activities also were undertaken. Figure 1 showed that while the proportion of those who relied on their own business for income solely was small (about 5% in both years), about a fifth of graduates supplemented their employment with a business. This seems to point to the livelihood opportunities afforded to graduates by access to tertiary education, both in terms of formal employment and starting a business.

Across the years of data collection, most graduates who had businesses cited the need to make money and help people as having driven them to begin their businesses (Table 1). Second was the desire to have additional income.

Table 1: Primary reason for starting a business

Primary reason	Year	
	2020	2022
Make money and help people	60%	55%
More income	36%	32%
Had a good idea	33%	36%
Opportunity or space in the market	31%	37%
Independence	22%	25%
Could not find a job	14%	16%
Flexible hours of work	8%	16%

Source: Authors' calculations from Wave 1 and 3 data from the TIE Alumni Tracer Study

What Table 1 also shows is the nuanced nature of graduate journeys into entrepreneurship which included necessity, opportunity, and intentionality. For some the need to make money and help people were key drivers; for others seeing an opportunity in the market or wanting additional income drew them to begin their own businesses. Interviewee statements illustrate their different routes into entrepreneurship.

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> *… I wanted to set up the yoghurt manufacturing company, aside from its potential to sell, [was] its potential to employ most of the young people in my locality, in my community. (Pedro, Ghana, 2020)*

Table 1 demonstrates the overlaps in the drivers of entrepreneurship. For instance, entrepreneurship training and resources provided by the scholarship fund enabled graduates to address immediate challenges in their lives and/or communities, thus responding from a point of necessity. Prioritising family obligation is a sentiment that was expressed by graduates in in-depth interviews:

> *… You have a business somewhere… you have a side hustle, but I have like two or three businesses running, run by my sisters. (Sabrina, Uganda, 2021)*

Furthermore, these opportunities and resources encouraged Alumni to explore entrepreneurship as a possible livelihood pathway with some making a success of these opportunities during and after university.

A foot in the door

Many tertiary graduates are underemployed, either due to their contracts being temporary, short-term, or part-time. Some (34% of those employed in 2020 and 30% in 2022) are employed in positions incommensurate with their qualifications or they have been forced to take up positions in a field or sector not of their choosing. For some this is a result of their age or life stage, finding work in the non-governmental organisation sector after the completion of their undergraduate studies. Many who follow this route initially access an internship with a stipend, positions which may become less "under" employed as they prove themselves and demonstrate their abilities. Of the 76 graduates interviewed in 2021 who were in paid employment, most felt that their jobs were dignified and fulfilling. A few felt that their jobs were not completely dignified and fulfilling or just one of the two. Some interviewees felt that while not completely dignified and fulfilling, their current jobs were a steppingstone where they could "build capacity and skills" to more dignified and fulfilling work (Godfrey, Uganda, 2021).

A strategy was observed through graduates who found work initially on a stipend or part-time basis and were initially underemployed. They would go back and complete micro-credentials while working. Education intended to assist their work in monitoring and evaluation project management or other areas. Some would then get promoted. For others, underemployment was not age-related and was due to the limited number of high-quality formal jobs in their particular contexts.

Discussion and conclusion

Drawing from the findings, we can conclude that the pathways graduates take after completing their studies are multidimensional and complex. In addition, graduates generate livelihoods through having multiple sources of income, furthering their education, self-generation and using underemployment as a means to securing well-paying employment later. While many graduates transitioned into the world of work, few

had realized their aspirations in this sphere, meaning that they needed to continually cultivate agency to find their way along non-linear pathways that are made and remade. This form of agency, which exists in contexts with limited institutional support and few opportunities, is a key navigational capacity, as outlined by Swartz (2021).

In spite of the earlier outlined limitation of this study, this article does expand the literature in at least three important ways. First, the findings corroborate those of Juárez and Gayet (2014), Mwaura (2017), Rogan and Reynolds (2016), and Webb (2021) on the diverse nature of post-university pathways. This study, however, provides this evidence from multiple African countries and from the African diaspora. The use of panel, rather than cross-sectional, data and qualitative data strengthens the trustworthiness of the findings. The qualitative research highlights the nature of transitions, as graduates use their navigational capacities across time and space to create non-linear, complex pathways, affirming Swartz's (2021) understanding of navigational capacities.

Secondly, the findings on self-generated income through businesses and entrepreneurship challenges some of the dominant tropes in the literature which has tended to frame 'necessity', 'opportunity' and/or the provision of training/funds as the main drivers of entrepreneurship (Bayart & Saleilles, 2019; Mgumia, 2017). Instead, we argue that these drivers overlap.

The third and most important contribution is that the findings provide evidence for universities to be active in supporting graduate transitions and also preparing current students for the realities of cultivating a livelihood after graduation. Given the tendency of graduates to generate livelihoods through business ventures, entrepreneurship education as part of a formal curriculum or through micro-credentialing should be provided. Universities can offer entrepreneurship courses or programmes that provide students with the knowledge, skills, and mindset required to start and manage their own businesses, covering topics such as business planning, marketing, financial management, and networking. However, skills training in entrepreneurship is insufficient for enabling successful small business ventures. Research indicates these activities need to be combined with creating an enabling environment, business experience and institutional support. Without adequate linkages to post-education support from public sector institutions, agencies and private sector partners, helping new business to access resources, goods and services, the chances of their success is greatly diminished. This kind of linkage should ideally begin in the planning stage of the programme.

In this way, universities could act as a connecting node for resources, partnerships and support, offering continuing education programmes or professional development courses that help graduates update their skills and knowledge to adapt to changing market trends. These programmes can enable graduates to explore new, and sometimes informal, income-generating opportunities and stay competitive in their chosen fields.

The career services offered by universities should include helping graduates explore diverse career paths and identify opportunities for income diversification. This can involve providing guidance on resume building, interview preparation, job searching, and connecting students with alumni networks and industry professionals. Universities can also provide access to resources and facilities that support income diversification.

This could include co-working spaces, business incubators or accelerators, access to industry databases or market research, and financial support through grants or seed funding programmes.

Building and maintaining a strong alumni network can be beneficial for graduates seeking income diversification. Universities can foster connections among alumni, creating platforms for collaboration, mentorship, and knowledge-sharing. This can facilitate opportunities for graduates to tap into the experiences and networks of fellow alumni who have diversified their incomes successfully. Showcasing the success stories of alumni who have successfully diversified their incomes can inspire and motivate current students and recent graduates and change the prevalent 'education to jobs' narrative.

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Ethics statement

Ethical clearance for the larger study was obtained through the Human Sciences Research Council's Research Ethics Committee, protocol number REC 6/19/06/19.

Potential conflict of interest

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Learning from students: Factors that support student engagement in blended learning environments within and beyond classrooms

Leer by studente: Faktore wat studentebetrokkenheid in gemengde leeromgewings binne en buite klaskamers ondersteun

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ABSTRACT

Technology is key to making education systems more resilient to disruptions. In the South African higher education sector, technology will continue to play a much larger role than in the years preceding the COVID-19 pandemic. Technology, however, cannot replace the value gained through social contact and concerns about relational disengagement in curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular spaces have been noted. Drawing on large-scale qualitative data collected as part of the South African Survey of Student Engagement, this article explores what students consider as the most important factors in supporting their learning and development and how these factors might be translated to technologically enhanced learning and teaching spaces. Such insights from students' experiences could inform blended learning and teaching spaces that leverage technology to enhance relational engagement.

KEYWORDS

Blended learning, student engagement, relational engagement, COVID-19, South African Survey of Student Engagement, higher education

OPSOMMING

Tegnologie is die sleutel om onderwysstelsels meer bestand te maak teen ontwrigtings. In die Suid-Afrikaanse hoëronderwyssektor sal tegnologie steeds 'n veel groter rol speel as tydens die jare wat die COVID-19-pandemie voorafgegaan het. Tegnologie kan egter nie die waarde vervang wat verkry word deur sosiale kontak nie en kommer oor verhoudingsonbetrokkenheid in kurrikulêre, ko-kurrikulêre en buite-kurrikulêre ruimtes is aangeteken. Met behulp van grootskaalse kwalitatiewe data wat as deel van die Suid-Afrikaanse Opname van Studentebetrokkenheid ingesamel is, ondersoek hierdie artikel dit wat studente die belangrikste faktore in die ondersteuning van hul leer en ontwikkeling beskou en hoe hierdie faktore omgesit kan word in tegnologies verbeterde leer- en onderrigruimtes. Sulke insigte uit studente se ervarings kan geïntegreerde leer- en onderrigruimtes met behulp van tegnologie gebruik om verhoudingsbetrokkenheid uit te bou.

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SLEUTELWOORDE
Gemengde leer, studentebetrokkenheid, verhoudingsbetrokkenheid, COVID 19, Suid-Afrikaanse Opname van Studentebetrokkenheid, hoëronderwys

Introduction

Longitudinal data from the South African Survey of Student Engagement (SASSE) show decreases in relational engagement indicators, such as student-staff interaction, collaborative learning, and quality of interactions when online learning was implemented in response to disruptions, such as the Fallist protests and the COVID-19 pandemic (Centre for Teaching and Learning, forthcoming). Relational engagement indicators, as identified here, refer to students' interactions with lecturers, particularly outside of formal classroom contexts, how they study with peers within and beyond classrooms, and how good they perceive relationships to be with other students, lecturers, and support staff. Challenges with relational engagement in online spaces, particularly in predominantly contact-based institutions (as opposed to institutions that provide distance or online education) are not unique to the South African context. Using the SASSE's parent survey, the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), developed at Indiana University in the US, other studies have also found negative correlations between online learning and teaching contexts and relational engagement indicators (Dumford & Miller, 2018; Paulsen & McCormick, 2020). Concerns about relational engagement within and beyond the classroom have also been highlighted qualitatively by students and staff in national surveys conducted during 2020 and 2021, respectively, in the South African higher education context (Council on Higher Education [CHE], 2021; Department of Higher Education and Training [DHET], 2020). It is therefore important to find ways of enhancing relational engagements between students, their peers, and staff as contact institutions move towards more blended learning and teaching contexts. For this, we explore student engagement as a conceptual framework in contact and online or distance contexts and use elements of student engagement to learn from students' experiences which factors matter in enhancing relational engagement.

Student engagement

The concept and measurement of student engagement has been central to understanding student experiences in higher education. Kuh (2001) describes student engagement as the extent to which students participate in educationally purposeful behaviours, and the extent to which institutions create an environment that enables students' participation in such behaviours. Educationally purposeful activities refer to behaviours that have been identified through research as being valuable contributors to learning and, ultimately, student success. Strydom and Loots (2020) summarise examples of such behaviours as the amount of time spent on learning tasks (Carroll, 1963), the quality of students' effort (Pace, 1984), behaviours underpinned by the principles for good practice in undergraduate education (Chickering & Gamson, 1987), students' active participation in their studies (Astin, 1977), and behaviours that contribute to student

success as outlined by the meta-analyses of factors contributing to student success by Pascarella and Terenzini (1991, 2005).

Other conceptualisations of student engagement have developed over the years – all recognising the interplay between students and institutions in promoting student engagement. Trowler (2010), for example, positions student engagement as the interaction between time, effort, and resources, aiming to both optimise the student experience and the performance of the institution, while Barkley (2010) argues for student engagement as the pedagogical result of interaction between motivation and active learning.

Student engagement, as measured in South Africa through the SASSE surveys, can be categorised into four themes, or areas of engagement, within which relational engagement indicators are spread out. The four themes include (i) academic challenge (purposeful learning behaviours taking place within the curriculum), (ii) learning with peers (purposeful learning behaviours with peers within or outside of the curriculum), (iii) experience with staff (relational engagement with lecturers and pedagogy), and (iv) campus environment (including perceptions of support, well-being, engagements in co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, and quality of interactions) (Strydom & Foxcroft, 2017). Two of the four themes are about pedagogical engagement – with a particular emphasis on the relationship between students, knowledge, and lecturers. This is based on the premise that purposeful learning behaviours take place within the pedagogical relationship and consist of various forms of deep learning, such as higher-order learning or reflective and integrative learning, which require more than the memorisation of information (Kuh et al., 2010).

Lecturers who emphasise reflective and integrative learning motivate students to make connections between module content and various real-world examples by emphasising an examination of one's own beliefs, and others' perspectives and viewpoints, leading them to engage in deeper learning that enriches their understanding of module content (Huber & Hutchings, 2004; Laird et al., 2005). Facilitating a relationship with deep learning can only take place through good teaching and learning practices (Ambrose et al., 2010). Effective teaching practices promote student learning and skills and might include setting clear explanations, presenting work in an organised way, providing students with relatable examples, and providing students with timeous feedback to guide their learning. Another aspect of pedagogical engagement is students' relationships with lecturers. Students learn firsthand how experts think about and solve problems by interacting with staff members inside and outside of instructional settings (Kuh et al., 2010). As a result, staff become role models, mentors, and guides for lifelong learning. Students who have regular contact with lecturers and support staff are positively influenced by increasing students' cognitive growth, engagement, development and academic success (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Lecturers are often required to move between the roles of teacher, researcher, mentor, and advisor, making them key role players in students' educational journeys.

Another theme centres learning with peers. Purposeful learning behaviours with peers within or outside of the curriculum is an important contributor to mastering

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difficult material and developing interpersonal and social competence (Kuh, 2007). During the COVID-19 pandemic, students reported engaging significantly less with peers than before the pandemic (DHET, 2020). Studies on peer learning, however, seem to suggest that smaller class settings of tutorials or discussions, even when virtual, may promote better engagement through a strong discussion leader who is able to engage students to participate by using different techniques (Hollister et al., 2022). Another aspect of learning with peers is the value engagement with diverse others bring to students' academic and personal development, including preparing students to work in diverse environments (Crutcher et al., 2007).

Lastly, student engagement is about how students experience the campus environment in terms of their perceptions of support, whether they feel the institution cares about their well-being, student engagements in co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, and the quality of interactions they experience. Students benefit from and are more satisfied by supportive campus environments that cultivate positive relationships among students, lecturers, and staff (Kuh et al., 2010). The campus environment further influences students' relationships with peers, lecturers, and support and administrative staff. Institutions that are dedicated to enhancing student success should therefore focus on developing the campus environment in such a way to provide support to students across a variety of areas that include the cognitive, social and physical, within and beyond the classroom (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Aspects of campus environment that have been found to contribute to students' engagement, academic achievement, personal growth, social engagement, and a sense of belonging, include (i) academic resources and facilities, such as libraries, laboratories, equipment, and other infrastructure and resources, such as access to internet, as well as academic support services (Kuh et al., 2008); (ii) co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, such as student organisations, sport, and leadership opportunities (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005); (iii) opportunities for social engagement, including opportunities for cultural exchange, which contributes to the development of social skills, empathy, and global citizenship (Tinto, 1998); and (iv) creating a sense of belonging and care by helping students and staff feel part of a common community that cares for each other's well-being (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Kuh et al., 2008).

Student engagement has played a significant role in how the sector understands the changes in student populations in recent years (Mentz, 2012; Strydom et al., 2017; Universities South Africa [USAf], 2018a, 2018b, 2018c). Student engagement has also contributed to predicting student success (Schreiber & Yu, 2016); identifying institutional responsibilities in promoting engagement (Ivala & Kioko, 2013); and identifying what effective educational behaviours contribute to student success, such as tutorial programmes (University of the Free State [UFS], 2019) and academic advising (UFS, 2018). Student engagement work further advocates for implementing scaled initiatives or high-impact practices (HIPs), such as variations of peer learning or first-year experience initiatives to make a significant impact in the learning experiences of as many students as possible (Loots et al., 2017). Within classrooms, Kinzie et al. (2017) have replicated international studies in the South African context to identify which

pedagogical behaviours are most effective in stimulating students' engagement and success. They found that, among others, relational engagement behaviours, such as asking questions, contributing to discussions, having discussions with lecturers, asking other students for help, or offering help to others, and engaging in group work, have a positive impact on students' academic performance.

While findings illustrating the link between student engagement and success are invaluable in informing development initiatives, the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the trajectory of how learning and teaching evolves in contact institutions, particularly when the reliance of such institutions on technology will only increase to promote resilience to such large-scale disruptions. While we are navigating this evolution, there have been several studies on student engagement in online or distance education that we can learn from.

Student engagement in online or distance education

On discussing student engagement in online contexts, Kennedy (2020) draws on the work of Moore (1989), among others, to provide a helpful differentiation between an interaction perspective, an interactivity perspective, and a learning design perspective. An interaction perspective positions interactions (learner-instructor, learner-learner, and learner-content) as central to developing student engagement. Considerations for all three types of interactions are important in online learning and teaching contexts and the importance of all three types of interaction has been confirmed in other contexts. For example, in an Indonesian context, Muzammil et al. (2020) found that interactions among students, between students and instructors, and interactions between students and content resulted in increased levels of student engagement. In contrast to the interaction perspective, the interactivity perspective is built on the premise that interacting with technology makes learning more engaging. Behavioural engagement and cognitive engagement stand out. Behavioural engagement is measured by counting clicks, mapping navigation, and so forth. In e-learning, student engagement is often restricted to observable behaviours, such as the number of student responses to lecturers' questions, or the number of students who participated in a class activity (Adams et al., 2021). Cognitive engagement, on the other hand, is measured by students' engagement with the learning material at a deeper level, such as implementing a learning taxonomy, or levels of learning, to guide deeper learning progression.

In terms of a learning design perspective of student engagement, Kennedy (2020, p. 3) states that the "way in which teachers design and develop online learning environments for students is – implicitly or explicitly – based on an underlying understanding, theory or framework of how they think students learn". Such underlying understanding informs the design favoured by teachers or lecturers, which might include a preference for problem-based learning, simulation-based learning models, or peer-based learning models.

Another perspective is engagement theory, which Kearsley and Shneiderman (1998) positioned as a framework for technology-based teaching and learning. Kearsley and Shneiderman's work is based on the premise that students must be meaningfully

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engaged in learning activities through interaction with others and worthwhile tasks – the latter of which could be translated into learning activities that are collaborative, project-based, and have an outside or authentic focus.

Importantly, at the core of these perspectives to enhance student engagement is not the technology used, but the understanding of learning and how technology can be used to leverage learning in the specific subject context.

Having explored the concept of student engagement in contact and distance or online learning, we now turn to students' experiences of engagement.

Methodology

The SASSE was adapted to the South African context from the NSSE and first administered in 2007. Since then, the SASSE has been administered annually and at almost all public higher education institutions. The SASSE measures ten student engagement indictors, grouped into the four themes noted earlier, and, until 2021, it had focused only on collecting quantitative data, as the main purpose of the SASSE is to provide institutions with a high-level overview of students' engagement that can stimulate self-reflection and benchmarking to identify areas where interventions are necessary. In 2021, the SASSE team, guided by the example of the NSSE team in the US, included one qualitative question to the SASSE administration to explore the value a qualitative question might add to the quantitative survey. The 2021 administration of the SASSE included ten institutions and a sample of 14,175 undergraduate students who answered the following qualitative question: *What has been the most important factor contributing to your learning and development at this institution, and why?*

The data were analysed through the lens of the the student engagement themes identified earlier, namely pedagogical enhancement, learning with peers, and how students experience the campus environment. For example, if students mentioned learning or lecturers as being the most important factor contributing to their learning and development, this was first coded under the pedagogical enhancement theme. Subsequent coding would then explore the details of what students consider to have been contributing to their learning and development in this context, and how these factors might be translated into enhancing relational engagement in technologically enhanced learning and teaching spaces. This method of analysis was repeated for the student engagement themes to provide insight into the factors students felt most contributed to their learning and development and whether these factors could remain similar in a more blended learning environment. Students' responses related to each student engagement theme are shared next.

Student responses

Pedagogical engagement: The relationship between students, knowledge, and lecturers

Lecturers are a key contact point between students and the institution. Thus, the relationship between lecturers and their students are important to nurture. Several

students commented that lecturers played a central role in their learning and development. Two aspects about lecturers were highlighted: having caring relationships with lecturers and the importance of having lecturers who engage in good teaching practices. Caring relationships in this context refer to students feeling supported and understood by lecturers, being motivated by lecturers, experiencing a sense of generosity and helpfulness from lecturers, and easily communicating with lecturers. Some of the students' comments regarding the relationship with their lecturers are shared here:

> *The support and understanding of lecturers. Their willingness to help.*
>
> *Motivation from lecturers. Most of my lecturers are always motivating us to study hard.*
>
> *Having awesome lecturers that are not afraid to share information.*
>
> *The ease of communication with the lectures has been helpful in dealing with challenges.*

In terms of good teaching practices, students appreciated how lecturers help them to understand content by breaking it up into more digestible pieces, how lecturers kept them engaged, and provided them with constructive feedback. Some examples of how students referred to good teaching practices as important contributors to their learning and development include:

> *The manner in which my lectures teach me – they are able to make me understand the content fully.*
>
> *Lecturers have kept me engaged with the content and made it more digestible.*
>
> *Feedback from lecturers. It serves as a reminder to put in more effort and is motivating.*

None of the factors that students appreciated most from lecturers in terms of their relationships with them as well as good teaching practices, are bound to face-to-face encounters. Showing a sense of care, motivating students, and communicating well can take place in many forms and through varying channels. Similarly, innovative ways of using technology to provide feedback to students or implement good teaching practices are well documented in distance education literature (e.g., Jaekel et al., 2023; Nsiah, 2013; Singaram et al., 2022).

Beyond good teaching and learning practices, another aspect of students' relationship with knowledge is whether they perceive their education as being of good quality. Students' perceptions of quality come in different forms. For example, the examples shown here all have to do with how students perceive quality. The quote below is about having well researched and documented content, where students are able to see the relevance of what they are learning.

> *I would say that the curriculum for each module have been thoroughly researched. It has also been very well organised and well-documented in the study guides.*

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Recognising the importance of a well-constructed curriculum is important, especially considering that anyone can access a range of knowledge about any topics via the internet, YouTube, open-access publications, and even open-access MOOCs. Presenting a curriculum that contains relevant and well-structured knowledge, is therefore an important contribution to quality. Good, organised teaching practices also confirm Kuh and colleagues' (2010) positioning of effective teaching practices as indicators of student engagement. The second quote is about institutional reputation. This student commented on the prominence of the university and its lecturers as an aspect of quality:

> *This institution is ranked one of the best in South Africa. It has prominent lecturers who will go above and beyond to help you pass your modules. I must say I've gained a lot of knowledge from my course, and I'm privileged because of the learning experiences.*

Lastly, quality also took the form of deep learning. In this case the student refers to being able to apply theoretical concepts:

> *Being able to apply the concepts in the real world, and to be able to optimise businesses and make them efficient using software and mathematics.*

References such as this one about being able to apply concepts in the real world relate directly to higher-order and reflective and integrative learning, or deep learning, which Kuh et al. (2010) argue is central to academic engagement. Well-designed online or blended learning assessments can ensure that students are able to apply theoretical concepts in practice.

Learning with peers

The following quotes from students are examples of how they see the role of peers in their learning and development:

> *The support from other students. Having people around that feel the same way and had to deal with the same stressful situations and load of work gives me comfort. It's good to know I'm not alone.*
>
> *Learning within a group helped me a lot, we always pushed each other and supported each other.*
>
> *Helping me evaluate my performance and engagement with peers during learning.*
>
> *The tutors make it easy for us to know what is required from us; they are able to relate to where we are struggling.*
>
> *I learned to work with other students' beliefs and opinions that are different from mine; the importance of respecting their religion and understanding that everyone is unique.*

Peers enable a sense of kinship or belonging for students and are important contributors to learning. The first two quotes above illustrate this kinship – when students feel they are receiving support from other students, they feel less alone in their struggles. The last quotes illustrate how peers contribute to each other's learning by motivating each

other, evaluating performances, relating better to peers than to lecturers, and reflecting on their own opinions in relation to diverse others' opinions. Such findings support that of Kuh (2007), and Crutcher et al. (2007) noted earlier on the importance of peers in mastering difficult materials and contributing to the development of interpersonal and social competence, as well as what students gain through interactions with diverse others. The latter forms part of reflective and integrative learning, which is a key indicator of the SASSE. As noted earlier, students indicated that they did not engage much with their peers formally during the pandemic, resulting in much less peer learning taking place (DHET, 2020). However, as we move towards integrating more technology in learning and teaching spaces, it will be important to focus on how peer learning can be optimised through technology.

Campus environment

The last engagement theme focuses on students' relationships with the institution through the campus environment. From students' perspectives, having access to the following support structures or initiatives has a big impact on their learning and development: academic advising, infrastructure and resources, counselling, funding, co- or extra-curricular activities, and personal motivation and drive. Each will be discussed briefly.

Academic advising

The three quotes below each represent the different ways in which academic advising helps students. The first quote is about teaching students skills, which might include time management or planning as this student said. But it can also include study skills, goal setting, and other important skills to help students cope with the demands of their studies. The second quote is about helping students navigate the system, such as making the right subject choices or in this student's case, helping them understand how appeals work. The last quote illustrates that advising can help students develop personally – to tap into their strengths and reflect on who they are and where they want to be.

> *Advice from academic advisors has been of huge benefit with regards to planning my learning and developing time management skills. This has helped me deal with the heavy workload I get from school.*
>
> *The academic advisor. He has been so supportive, he helped me so much to appeal and continue with my studies.*
>
> *Academic advising taught me a lot in terms of my academics, it made me discover my true passion and all the necessary strategies I need to use in order to achieve the goals I set for myself.*

Infrastructure and resources

Access to infrastructure and resources has been a hot topic since 2020 but has been long been argued as a contributor to students' engagement (e.g. Kuh et al., 2008). Having

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access to appropriate devices, network, data, and the necessary digital skills to make optimal use of technology are vital components in supporting student success. For the students whose quotes we use as examples here, having access to a quiet study space in the library, being able to access resources on campus, having stable internet access, and learning how to use a computer, have been listed as the factors that made the most impact on their learning and development at the institution.

> *The fact that I stay on campus. I do not have a laptop or smartphone. I also do not have money to travel to campus every day to make use of the facilities. Staying on campus also means I can get help from students studying the same course.*
>
> *Having access to the internet. It has been the most important factor because all my modules give out assignments that require thorough research.*
>
> *Being able to learn how to use a computer – it helped to make things easier academically.*
>
> *Accessibility to the library and lecture halls after learning hours. This is because most residences have a lot of noise, so I use the lecture hall to study [with a computer].*
>
> *Access to counselling services*

Several students commented on how being able to access mental health services through the university helped them in different ways. In the first quote below, the student shares how they received support when their grandfather passed away, which also helped them cope better with other difficulties they encountered in subsequent years. The second quote shows how mental health support does not have to be limited to one-on-one personalized support, but that group sessions on how to cope or in this student's case, understanding varsity better, can be used to reach more students.

> *In my first year when my grandfather passed away. It was so difficult for me to cope. I attended a few sessions of counselling and ever since I have been better able to cope every year whenever I have encountered difficulties.*
>
> *Our institution offers counselling for students with personal issues, we are at times invited to attend programmes that makes us understand varsity better, how it differs from high school and most importantly how we should deal with this whole new experience (as I am a first-year student).*

Co- and extra-curricular activities

Students gave many examples of co- or extra-curricular activities that have had a significant influence on their learning and development, some of which are shared in the quotes below. The important take-away from these examples is that learning and development extend beyond the classroom.

> *My internship, I've gained a lot of practical knowledge which has made me look at the course in a broader way and understand how things work in a much more practical way.*

HIV/AIDS Peer Education program has enriched me in terms of personal development, facilitation and leadership skills. It has taught me not to tolerate discrimination and embrace the concept of diversity and inclusivity for everyone.

The institution also provides debate societies that help sharpen the mind. They provided moot courts as well to help law students prepare for litigation procedures.

My involvement in student organisations and leadership taught me many skills that I am grateful for and has been a large contributor in meeting people from different backgrounds.

The extracurricular activities, like sport, because in sport you learn the value of teamwork.

Financial support

Many students commented that having financial support was the most important factor in their learning and development – mainly because it enabled them to participate in education by paying tuition and other fees, but it also enabled them to purchase laptops and data. Merit bursaries are also motivation for students to study hard, and holistic bursaries from foundations or other providers often supply additional support, such as advising and even psychological support to students. An important non-monetary contribution that funding makes is illustrated in the last quote – putting at least some of the anxiety over their futures to rest for the time being. Some quotes from students include:

NSFAS For paying fees, accommodation and allowance, if it was not for it, I would not be here.

The fact that there is a merit bursary for 75% average also motivates me daily, and that was one of the main reasons why I chose to study here.

The most important factor has been my bursary, as they support me in everything but most of all is that they support me financially.

Having a bursary to pay out all expenses. Not having the stress to ask other people for money and having the calmness to know that I will have a job after my studies.

Personal and social factors

There are several personal and social factors that students consider as having had the most impact on their learning and development. Some of which include being passionate about what they are studying, being disciplined towards reaching their goals, realizing the importance of self-care, and relying on religious beliefs to support them through their studies. A significant number of students also commented that their family, their socio-economic background, or the communities they come from are the main contributors to their learning and development. The quotes shared here illustrate some of this focus:

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> *My family. I want to make my family proud of me since [I] am the first one to be on varsity.*
>
> *I'm motivated by my background and the type of institution I'm in. I come from a very poor background with no graduates and I was the lucky one who was blessed to go [to] tertiary, when I go home I can see it in everyone's faces that they are proud of me; I can't let them down, and I can't let myself down either.*

Besides physically participating in sport, the sub-themes that contribute to a supportive campus environment highlighted here – academic advising, access to infrastructure and resources, counselling services, co- and extra-curricular activities, leveraging financial support, and acknowledging personal and social factors influencing students – are not bound to face-to-face encounters. Equipping students and staff with necessary access to technological infrastructure and resources, supporting the development of digital skills and competencies, and creating well designed support structures can enable support departments to reach more students through technology. For example, hosting mental health webinars, or facilitating online workshops on study skills can reach significantly more students than face-to-face consultations.

Discussion

The student data confirm the importance of pedagogical relationships between students and lecturers, students and peers, students and content, but also relationships between students and the broader institution. A valuable contribution to the interactive perspective (Moore, 1989) is that student learning and development are not bound to pedagogical relationships, but extend to relationships with support and administrative staff, and peers beyond the physical or virtual classroom.

Regarding relationships with lecturers and content, what stands out for students is a sense of care, good teaching practices, and receiving quality education, while relationships with peers are key to nurturing a sense of belonging and deeper engagement with content. Having access to academic and non-academic support, technology and infrastructure, and access to platforms where students can develop personally and socially are key factors that determine the quality of students' relationship with the institution as a whole.

Another indirect contribution to an interactive perspective on student engagement is the emphasis students placed on the personal and social factors that motivate and drive them to pursue further education. If we do not understand how students' backgrounds or current circumstances influence their behaviours, we are unlikely to build rapport with them and develop caring relationships.

A limitation of this study is the inability to include the majority of student voices because of the size of the dataset. Qualitative studies are typically not this big, and the presentation of data is limited to student voices representing broad themes. On the other hand, inclusion of the themes noted in this article acknowledges that many students identified these factors as significant contributors to their learning and development, thereby lending credibility to the student voices.

Ultimately, what students' reflections have shown is that technology is just a platform and that the real value behind relational engagement lies with the people that make an effort to care and support students on their educational journeys. Neither engagement literature, nor the students' experiences shared in this article regard technology as an inhibitor of engagement if there is a clear understanding of what the needs of students are, how learning works, and how to best translate these understandings into online spaces. It is the responsibility of institutions to become knowledgeable about who their students are, and how to best create blended environments that support learning and development – within and beyond the classroom.

Conclusion

This study explored what students note as the most important factors supporting their learning and development at university and how these factors might be translated into enhancing relational engagement in technologically enhanced learning and teaching spaces. We analysed the data through a student engagement lens, with a particular focus on how engagement manifests in pedagogical relationships, peer relationships and relationships beyond the classroom.

The emergency remote learning and teaching response during the COVID-19 pandemic provided South African higher education institutions with a glimpse of the benefits and challenges a more technologically enhanced sector might hold (e.g. CHE, 2021; DHET, 2020). Concerns about relational engagement during this time sparked conversations about whether technology could widen gaps between students and their lecturers, students and their peers, and even students and the content they should engage with. By bringing in students' relationship experiences and drawing on literature guiding engagement in online learning and teaching contexts, we are not necessarily concerned. Relationships will remain central to engagement, regardless of the learning platform, and with appropriate learning design, these relationships could be enhanced with technology. Learning from students in this way also contributes to how we should think about leveraging technology in the areas that matter to students as a means to enhance curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular student engagement, while paying particular attention to how relationships can be strengthened in a more technologically advanced sector. More research on relational engagement, particularly in the South African context, would be helpful to find ways of leveraging technology without disadvantaging students who might not have access to infrastructure, resources, or the skills and competencies to fully access blended learning environments.

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Ethics statement

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Access to and effectiveness of support services for students in extended curriculum programmes at a South African university

Toegang tot en doeltreffendheid van studentesteundienste in verlengde kurrikulumprogramme by 'n Suid-Afrikaanse universiteit

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ABSTRACT

In South Africa, many students enter university without the skills required for success in higher education. Extended curriculum programmes (ECP) were developed to provide students who showed potential but were underprepared with the necessary foundations to achieve success in higher education. Student support services are essential to student success. This has been apparent especially in universities enrolling academically underprepared students. This study, conducted by the Office of the Academic Advisor at the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences at Stellenbosch University, aimed to explore the effectiveness of and participation in support services available to students in the ECP. The last cohort of ECP students was accepted at the faculty in 2018 for the MBChB, BSc Physiotherapy, and BSc Speech-Language and Hearing Therapy degrees. On successful completion of the ECP, students join the second year of their respective mainstream programme and are tracked throughout their academic career with dedicated support services offered to them. As students transition from the ECP, they need to utilise their own agency to access the support services available. A quantitative survey including qualitative responses was used for data collection and was explored using thematic analysis. Specifically, the study explored students' awareness and utilisation of, and their expressed interest in, the available support services. It was important to investigate the support needs of ECP students as an increasing need for support services had been identified during the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, minimal data were evident on support needs of senior ECP students and especially on this population in health sciences. The research gave greater insight into students' support needs. The findings indicated that students were familiar with and had accessed support services to an extent that they were able to share firsthand experiences of accessing support at the university.

KEYWORDS

Academic development, at-risk students, extended curriculum programmes, health sciences, higher education, medical students, student affairs, student support services

OPSOMMING

In Suid-Afrika gaan vele studente universiteit toe sonder die vaardighede vir sukses in hoër onderwys. Verlengde kurrikulumprogramme (VKP) is ontwikkel om aan studente wat potensiaal toon maar onvoldoende voorbereid is, die nodige grondslag te bied om sukses in hoër onderwys

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te behaal. Studentesteundienste is noodsaaklik vir studentesukses en veral in universiteite wat akademies onvoldoende voorbereid studente toelaat. Die oogmerk met hierdie studie deur die Kantoor van die Akademiese Adviseur aan die Universiteit Stellenbosch se Fakulteit Geneeskunde en Gesondheidswetenskappe was om die effektiwiteit van en deelname aan beskikbare steundienste vir studente in die VKP te ondersoek. Die fakulteit het die laaste kohort VKPstudente in 2018 vir die graadprogramme MBChB, BSc Fisioterapie, en BSc Spraak-Taal- en Gehoorterapie ingeskryf. Ná die suksesvolle afhandeling van die VKP sluit studente by die tweede jaar van die betrokke hoofstroomprogram aan en word vir hul volle akademiese loopbaan deur toegewyde steundienste gemonitor. Namate studente vanaf die VKP oorskakel, moet hulle eie agentskap gebruik om toegang tot die beskikbare steundienste te verkry.'n Kwantitatiewe opname, wat kwalitatiewe response insluit, is vir data-insameling gebruik en via 'n tematiese ontleding ondersoek. Die studie het spesifiek studente se bewustheid en gebruik van, en hulle uitgesproke belangstelling in, die beskikbare steundienste beskou. Dit was van belang om VKPstudente se steundienstebehoeftes te ondersoek aangesien die COVID19-pandemie 'n toenemende behoefte aan steundienste uitgewys het. Minimale data het steundienstebehoeftes onder senior VKPstudente aangedui, en veral onder die gesondheidswetenskappepopulasie. Minimale data het vervolgens die behoeftes aan steun onder senior VKPstudente en spesifiek onder hierdie populasie in die gesondheidswetenskappe uitgewys. Die navorsing het beter insig gegee in die ondersteuning waaraan studente behoefte het. Volgens die bevindings was studente vertroud met en het hulle toegang gehad tot steundienste, in só 'n mate dat hulle eerstehandse ervarings van toegang tot steun aan die universiteit kon deel.

SLEUTELWOORDE
Akademiese ontwikkeling, risiko-studente, verlengde kurrikulumprogram (VKP), gesondheidswetenskappe, hoër onderwys, mediese studente, studente sake, studentesteundienste

Introduction

In South Africa, many students enter higher education without the necessary prerequisite skills, role models, support structures and cultural capital, which are important for success (Council on Higher Education [CHE], 2013). These students may not engage in self-help-seeking behaviours and may be less likely to seek assistance when required (Raviv et al., 2009).

Higher education has seen the introduction of large-scale student support programmes, bridging and foundational programmes, counselling and career guidance, more explicit and transparent expectations and criteria for assessment and different pedagogies due to increased student numbers, including 'non-traditional students' such as students from disadvantaged communities and first-generation students (Webbstock, 2016). Low student throughput is a common issue faced in higher education, with estimations indicating that 50% of students who enter higher education complete their qualification, with 30% of graduates completing their degree in minimum time (CHE, 2016). Low graduate production fails to meet South Africa's developmental and social cohesion needs. To address the low throughput and high dropout rates, sustained student support, flexible curricula, and innovative pedagogical approaches have been implemented (McKenna, 2016). Student support services within tertiary institutions are acknowledged as essential mechanisms to support students who are at risk. Due to various factors, the chances of them dropping out of their respective programmes and the higher education context altogether are higher. According to Lobo (2012), the main reasons students drop out include course unsuitability, academic difficulties and student preparedness, mismatch of student expectations and experiences, finances,

social and academic support from the university community and health and familial responsibilities. A lack of support from staff and fellow students and the amount of contact time students have with academic staff have been shown to influence students' decisions to drop out (Yorke, 2000a, 2000b; Lee et al., 2012).

Bridges (2008) states that student support services, especially those offered at universities enrolling academically underprepared students, are essential to student success. The support services aim to facilitate students' transition into higher education institutions and enhance retention of students (Munyaradzi & Addae, 2019). A 2017 study by Koen et al. found that investment in the well-being of students would strengthen the well-being behaviour of the organisation. In the current article, the organisation refers to the context of the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences (FMHS). The theoretical framework used in this study is Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model. This model of development is relevant here in that it emphasises the interaction between an individual's development and the systems within the social context (Landsberg et al., 2011). Individuals enter the faculty with existing capabilities that have been influenced by their family and friends, school, community and environment. Therefore, this is indicative of these students trying to obtain a sense of belonging within the faculty, community and university society.

The extended curriculum programme at the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences

Extended curriculum programmes (ECP) were developed to provide students who showed potential but were underprepared in terms of the necessary foundations to achieve access and success in higher education. ECPs extend a diploma programme or undergraduate degree by a year, enabling students to gain the necessary foundational skills for success in their qualification, such as academic literacy and learning skills, including writing competencies and information literacy (CHE, 2013).

The last cohort of ECP students accepted into the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences (FMHS) at Stellenbosch University (SU) was in 2018, with current students considered to be senior students in their third year up to their sixth and final year of study. Some of these students were accepted for undergraduate programmes such as MBChB, BSc Physiotherapy, and BSc Speech-Language and Hearing Therapy degrees (Stellenbosch University, 2016). An additional year of study was added to a mainstream degree. Students thus completed their first year over two years following a revised curriculum for the MBChB programme, and first-year modules completed over two years for the BSc Speech-Language and Hearing Therapy programme and BSc Physiotherapy programme with additional foundation courses for the BSc Physiotherapy programme. The ECP provides students with additional academic support to lay a strong academic foundation. On successful completion of the ECP, students join the second year of their respective mainstream programme. The current ECP senior students are the last group of students in the ECP as the programme has been phased out.

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Student support services and needs of students

Student support services address students' academic, emotional and social needs and are required for students' individual well-being and academic success (Tamulienė, 2014). Tamulienė (2014) further classifies support services into academic support, which aims to fulfil social and emotional needs that are directly linked to students' learning processes, such as the provision of academic information and counselling services, and non-academic support, which addresses students' social and emotional needs that have an indirect impact on their academic performance and includes financial support and psychological counselling services. Miller et al. (2011) found that first-generation students from low-income households were academically underprepared and required financial support. These students also dealt with psychosocial issues such as lack of support at home, lack of motivation, disciplinary issues, a need for basic study skills and time management, lack of transportation to campus and lack of regular access to the internet when not on campus. COVID-19 and the subsequent lockdown have also impacted many students and highlighted the inequalities many students still face, including access to resources such as the internet (Ross, 2021). Students at the FMHS at SU experience demanding study schedules linked to long hours of studying as well as attendance within the clinical domains. The added pressure of becoming a qualified health professional and developing their identity exerts immense stress on their character development. This is supported by the needs assessment conducted by Koen et al. (2017), whose findings indicated that these students were stressed, unable to manage their workloads and suffered from sleep deprivation.

Furthermore, many students also struggle with mental illnesses, with a rising prevalence of mental health disorders having been identified (Bantjes et al., 2016), especially among medical (Hope & Henderson, 2014) and health professions students (Macauley et al., 2018). ECP students in FMHS enter with significant academic and psychosocial issues related to the post-apartheid period and may be at risk of developing mental health challenges as indicated. Hence, student support services are paramount within the academic and clinical context of the required training programme.

Student support services available to ECP students within FMHS

Once students were promoted from the ECP, they were tracked throughout their academic careers and offered dedicated support services. The services, which were available free-of-charge to ECP students within FMHS, included university-wide student support services made available by the Centre for Student Counselling and Development (CSCD) and a dedicated registered psychologist and counsellor for these students specifically. Voluntary services included various work sessions on themes such as stress- and time management skills, individual counselling and therapy sessions and individual or group academic skills development sessions. As students transitioned out of the ECP, they needed to utilise their own agency in accessing the support services available to them. A support booklet was sent out to students advertising the available services at the CSCD as well as the processes for engagement with a specific service.

In 2020, FMHS appointed an academic advisor to address the specific needs of medicine and health sciences students and render academic support interventions. The Office of the Academic Advisor coordinates and renders support to senior ECP students as the ECP programme in the faculty was phased out in 2019. A faculty-specific student support booklet is provided to students, which details the steps needed to address academic, psychological, emotional, social, health, administrative and security needs. This includes contact details of people/services available to students at the FMHS. Students are, therefore, provided with abundant information regarding the resources available to them. This study, therefore, sought to explore the extent to which students in the ECP at the Stellenbosch University FMHS accessed the support services available to them and to assess which aspects of the support services, if any, could be improved to increase engagement with, participation in and effectiveness of the support services.

Method

Design and setting

We used a cross-sectional, quantitative research design with qualitative responses to describe the effectiveness of and participation in support services available to senior students in the ECP at the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences at a South African university.

Sample and recruitment

We used purposive sampling to recruit students who were in the senior ECP at the Faculty of Medicine and Health Science at Stellenbosch University. These students needed to be registered students who were in their second to final year of study and were 18 years of age or older. They also had to have access to their university email addresses as the survey was shared using the institution's email address. The study did not include students who were in the ECP but were not registered for the academic year as they had been academically excluded. In 2022, the faculty had 117 ECP students enrolled in the MBChB, BSc Physiotherapy and BSc Speech-Language and Hearing programmes.

Measures

Demographic information relating to students' age, gender, year of study and academic programme (e.g. MBChB) was collected. On the university's survey platform, the researchers developed a survey questionnaire based on literature, a previous informal survey sent to the ECP students, and surveys used in previous research exploring similar objectives and the researchers' professional experience with students. The questionnaire, consisting of multiple-choice and open-ended questions, was only available in English, as most students indicated this as their language of correspondence, and took approximately 5–10 minutes to complete.

Data collection

An email of invitation including a brief description of the study was sent to all the ECP students at the FMHS using their university email addresses, recognised by their student

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numbers. The email included a link to the online survey and the consent form. Informed consent was obtained using a tick box within the survey introduction. An initial invitation email was sent out, followed by several reminders to the ECP students, with one week between the initial and follow-up emails over a period of two months. Responses were confidential but complete anonymity could not be ensured.

Data were collected between July and September 2022 using the online survey. ECP students were asked to comment on the support services they engaged with, their level of engagement with support services, hesitancy in engaging with support services and improvements for increased effectiveness of and engagement with support services. Students were encouraged to participate in the survey by the prospect of winning one of six vouchers upon random selection. Students interested in participating had to provide an email address, which was automatically delinked from their responses.

Ethical considerations

This study was approved by Stellenbosch University's Division for Institutional Research and Planning and Health Research Ethics Committee (HREC) (Reference number: N22/02/013). All participants provided written informed consent prior to participation indicated via tick box.

Data analysis

Descriptive statistics performed in Excel were used to report findings related to the demographic information collected and the results of the multiple-choice questions in the survey. The qualitative responses were inductively thematically analysed following an iterative six-step process outlined by Braun and Clark (2012) using Atlas.ti v9 (Friese, 2021). Both authors conducted the initial analysis independently, and the coding framework was compared before the final coding book was created. Themes representative of the students' opinions and understandings of the effectiveness of support services offered to them were then identified from the final codebook.

Findings

The findings are presented in tables, figures and descriptive thematic analysis from the sample of senior ECP students at Stellenbosch University's FMHS. Study participants were 22 students from the MBChB, BSc Physiotherapy, and BSc Speech-Language and Hearing Therapy degrees, representing a 18.8% response rate.

Below are two tables through which themes and demographic information are summarised, while two figures display access and participation in support services and desriptive analyses of the themes identified.

Table 1 displays a list of themes and sub-themes identified by this sample of ECP senior students. Three themes and seven sub-themes describe the effectiveness of and participation in support services available to ECP students at the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences.

Table 1: Themes and sub-themes identified

Themes	Sub-themes
Appreciation of support	Helpfulness
	Accessible
Improvement of support	Waiting time
	Affordability
	Necessity of emotional support
Stigma around support	Awareness
	Negative experiences

The demographic characteristics of 18.8% of the participants are summarised in Table 2 and proportionally represent the ECP population at the time of the survey. The majority of participants who participated in the survey were females at 82% and 27% were aged 24 years. 90% of this sample were studying MBCHB and in their final year of studies.

Table 2: Demographic information of participants

		N	%
Gender	Male	4	18
	Female	18	82
Age	22 years	3	14
	23 years	4	18
	24 years	6	27
	25 years	5	23
	26 years	1	5
	27 years	3	14
Programme year	Year II	1	5
	Year III	0	0
	Year IV	6	27
	Year V	5	23
	Year VI	10	45
Academic programme	MBChB	20	90
	BSc Physio	1	5
	BSc Speech	1	5

In Figures 1 and 2 below, most students indicated that they were aware of both the support services offered by the faculty and the CSCD. More than half of the students indicated that they had used at least one of the support services offered to them. Those who had previously used support services were asked what they considered to be the most important support services. They indicated that the bursary office/financial aid was

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the most important, followed by health (medical) services. The services offered by the academic advisor and the CSCD were considered of equal importance, and tutoring was the least important support service on offer.

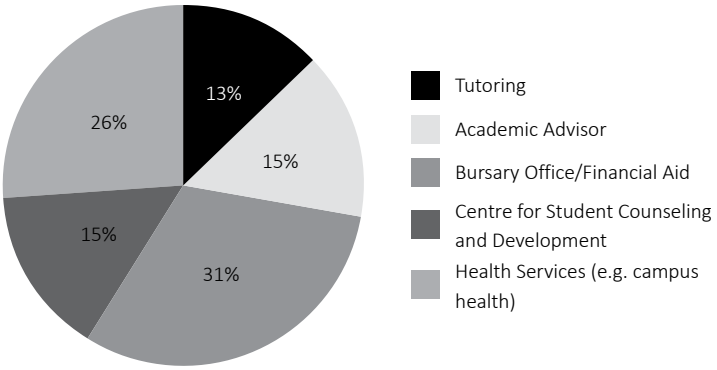

Figure 1: Most important support services

Students were asked to indicate the support service categories used, and they indicated that support services related to administrative, academic, and psychological/emotional or support needs were the most frequently used.

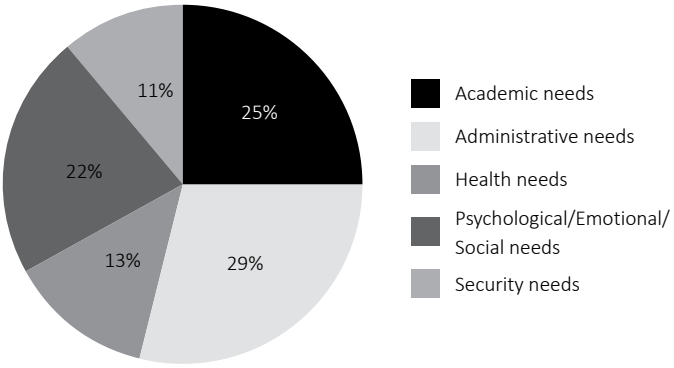

Figure 2: Support service categories used

Administrative needs were expressed most frequently used, followed by academic needs, then psychological/emotional needs, health needs and lastly security needs.

In the analysis of open-ended questions, three main themes could be identified that provide insight into the detail of support services that the students participated in and found effective. The three themes were: (1) Appreciation of support; (2) Improvement of support; and (3) Stigma around support.

Theme 1: Appreciation of support

Most students indicated that they appreciated the support services available to them, emphasising that these support services were helpful. They indicated that they, who were less privileged, could access psychological and medical services at an affordable rate.

> *I am grateful for the services because I know I would not have access to it otherwise. (Participant Q)*

> *At first I was hesitant but was so grateful for these services as it saved me so many times when I really had nowhere else to go. (Participant G)*

> *I have seen a great improvement in my study patterns and overall confidence since starting to attend the academic advisor multiple times during this year, and she has helped me find solutions to problems and ask questions that needs answering, often highlighting the important tasks and filtering out all the small factors I tend to fixate on. (Participant C)*

Students felt that support services impacted their academic performance positively. They described the staff as friendly and eager to help. Support services were found to be useful, and their experiences using them were positive. Hence, support services staff were also able to answer students' questions, and students benefitted from applicable solutions. Furthermore, students were referred to other specialised support services within the campus environment where needed.

Students added the importance of accessibility to support by indicating a specialised need for acute services. They were grateful for web links to support services and constant email reminders of support services available.

Theme 2: Improvement of support

Although most students in the study indicated that they were aware of the support services available, some also indicated that the awareness had come in the later years of their studies. This suggested that these students may have wished they had been made aware of these services in their earlier years of study. This could be an indicator towards improvement of support.

> *I don't think at the time I knew about it. Often many students are unaware of the services offered and only come to know about it when it is too late. (Participant A)*

> *Many students only become aware of the support services when it is too late. (Participant D)*

A criticism many students had, therefore, was that not enough was being done to make students aware of the services available to them; hence, improvement of support services was indicated. For students who used the support services, a big issue they experienced was lengthy waiting times, especially for services provided by the CSCD.

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> *I think the waiting lists for counselling are far too long but also understand [that] there is a greater demand than there [are] resources. (Participant M)*

> *The only thing that was not great is the waiting time. (Participant B)*

One student's response indicated the availability of support had increased over the years. However, they suggested that having more support staff would be beneficial as the demand for these support services had grown over the years, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. A need indicated for psychological services was emphasised, with one student recommending having one psychologist assigned to each residence on campus. One student's response highlighted that psychological services were needed when course demands or pressures were overwhelming. Another response suggested a preference to see the same psychologist every time they went for an appointment as their psychologist changed monthly. Most responses emphasised the need for emotional support linked to the provision of psychological services.

Theme 3: Stigma around support

The additional exposure to the clinical environment as part of the relevant training in their programme puts additional stress on students. Hence, training conditions contribute to the lack of seeking support, as it is associated with stigma. Students also referred to the stigma surrounding support on campus. One student indicated:

> *I have been here for many years, and I do think the stigma around needing assistance has changed, it has been reduced. (Participant F)*

Some students described the fears that they experienced when needing to make use of support services:

> *I used to feel really embarrassed to use support services especially accessing the Pantry Project. I felt ashamed for not having and feared that other students would see me. (Participant L)*

> *[I] feared that the service provider would not understand my issues based on my culture. (Participant A)*

> *But there have been occasions where I felt judged or made to feel like I did not need it. (Participant E)*

> *I was neglectful and avoidant when I started using support services. I had the idea that taking part in these services would take away my power. Would take away my say and give it to a third party. In the case of mental illness, I guess that is still true, but then again, perhaps that's a good thing, within reason. (Participant N)*

> *The fear of losing your voice is what scares most people away[.] [T]he fear of being told you 'crazy'. (Participant Q)*

The hospital environment was described as stressful, and students often did not get the necessary time to debrief after traumatic experiences. Further responses included the

high demands of students' coursework; somatic stress symptom experiences; struggles to manage stress and find positive outlets, to navigate their social and family lives and academia; social anxiety; the need for time and stress management skills and concerns about their career prospects once they had finished their studies. Some students also indicated the need for financial aid services.

Regarding disseminating information, students felt that information relating to support services should not be shared only via email, but instead on relevant and relatively more accessible platforms such as WhatsApp or SMS. One student suggested that a brief talk be conducted at the beginning of the academic year to remind students of the support services available to them. Further suggestions were placing posters at the computer labs advertising the support services and having the class representative for each year group send image advertisements with details about the support services on social media groups. Students suggested these as they received many emails and "most students do not read their emails".

Discussion

Students in the ECP at the FMHS found the support services on offer to be helpful and accessible. As many of the students were aware of the support services and how to access them, the implication is that these services are overall effective and accessible, positive and useful. This is supports the findins of Bridges (2008), who indicated that support services enhance student success, as well as Munyaradazi and Addae (2019) who stated that support services aim to facilitate students' transition to higher education. Students make use of the different categories of services available to them, but more frequently use the bursary/financial aid office and the medical health services available at campus which offer more affordable as well as pro bono rates for those who cannot afford them. Support services that cater to students' academic needs are also in demand, however, it was interesting to note that for most students psychological support services were considered less important.. These findings are consistent with that those of Bourdieu (1991) and Raviv et al. (2009), who describe students as not engaging with the necessary psychological support structures to facilitate success.

Like Kennelly et al. (2010) and McKauge et al. (2009), however, we noted that students often do not engage with support services, despite needing to do so. This is largely due to the lack of capacity owing to long waiting times as well as long turnaround times in accessing psychological services. Students are also aware of the potential stigma they may face when accessing these services which further prevents them from utilising these services. Furthermore, ECP students experience demanding and stressful study schedules as well as clinical training expectations, leading to a greater need for debriefing.

As observed by Miller et al. (2011), the FMHS ECP student responses proved that there was a need for those who could not afford support services to be able to access them based on their knowledge of the scarce accessibility of private or state care services external to the university. These students are exposed to immense psychosocial

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and traumatic experiences in clinical settings, requiring regular debriefing sessions and constant communication of support available to them.

Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to explore the extent to which ECP senior students at Stellenbosch University FMHS accessed support services and if they found them to be effective. The study used a cross-sectional quantitative research design with qualitative responses within the applicable context of a bio-ecological model theoretical framework for the specific FMHS and clinical context.

The findings fell within the following three broad themes: (1) Appreciation of support; (2) Improvement of support and (3) Stigma around support. For theme 1, Appreciation of support, students found support services helpful and beneficial and therefore appreciated how staff were friendly and helpful. For theme 2, Improvement of support, students indicated that even though support services were available to them, they only accessed them in the later years of their studies and recommended ways to better communicate support services to them. They also emphasised that issues with specific support services, like the lengthy waiting times for the CSCD, should be improved. For theme 3, Stigma around support, students described the fears they experienced around needing to make use of support services as a result of experiencing immense stress within the clinical platform during their training.

The results of our study indicated that although students felt that these student support services were helpful, accessible and effective, they require constant communication on the available support services. Students often feel overwhelmed by the academic and clinical demands of their studies and require specific support services which can cater for this specific need. Hence, academic advisory services can address this gap for this specific student population requiring student support services as indicated in this research study.

Limitations and recommendations

As researchers, we acknowledge that there were limitations to this study. These included the fact that we had a limited sample size as only 22 (18.8%) ECP students participated in the study. However, it must be noted that the survey was open for approximately five months and reminder emails were sent bi-weekly and then weekly in the last of these months. An incentive in the form of a lucky draw to win a gift voucher was provided to encourage student participation in the study. We also note that our study cohort comprised students with unique academic and clinical schedules. These schedules include being on call and observing an operation in the theatre, which can vary from six to fourteen hours at a time. Finally, although the use of an online survey was the most convenient form of data collection, given that this project was initially conceptualised during the COVID-19 pandemic, it would have been good to have follow-up focus group discussions or individual interviews with students to explore further and describe their perceptions of the effectiveness of and engagement with support services.

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Ethics statement
This study was approved by Stellenbosch University's Division for Institutional Research and Planning and Health Research Ethics Committee (HREC) (Reference number: N22/02/013).

Potential conflict of interest
The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Leading higher education transformation: The role of student affairs

Mener la transformation de l'enseignement supérieur : Le rôle des œuvres estudiantines

Chanaaz Charmain January[1]

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ABSTRACT

Student affairs practitioners and researchers are well positioned to contribute holistically to student success and as such could play a strategic role in the transformation of higher education. The aim of this article is to illustrate that a key strategic objective of student affairs is to contribute significantly towards student success. This article reports on a study (January, 2021) entitled 'Towards a qualitative framework for blending equity and excellence in transforming South African higher education transformation to achieve development' in which the promotion of student success is viewed as central to institutional transformation. The purpose of the study was to contribute to a more comprehensive qualitative framework for higher education transformation in South Africa by reconciling notions of 'equity and excellence'. Interviews were conducted with sixteen leaders in the field of higher education in South Africa. Thereafter, interview data were triangulated with strategic documents of various entities concerned with higher education transformation. The theoretical framework encapsulated the human capital and human capability theories and argues further for a reconciliation of these theories to promote social justice and human well-being. The study used grounded theory methods to analyse and present the comprehensive qualitative framework. The study found that student success was the most critical factor driving institutional transformation. In addition, four other interrelated elements were presented as the core elements of a comprehensive framework. Based on these findings, this article explores the implications for student affairs further, using unpublished input gathered by the author through reflective conversations with stakeholders at the University of Cape Town. In this regard the notion of a set of student learning imperatives (graduate attributes) becomes relevant to the discussion when student affairs practitioners and researchers collaborate with faculties and departments on strategic projects.

KEYWORDS

Equity, excellence, graduate attributes, human capital theory, capabilities approach, student success, student affairs practitioners, student affairs researchers, social justice, university transformation

RÉSUMÉ

Les praticiens et chercheurs du secteur des œuvres estudiantines sont bien placés pour contribuer de manière holistique à la réussite des étudiants et, à ce titre, ils pourraient jouer un rôle stratégique dans la transformation de l'enseignement supérieur. L'objectif de cet article est d'illustrer qu'un objectif stratégique clé des œuvres estudiantines est de contribuer de manière significative à la réussite des

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étudiants. Cet présente les résultats d'une étude menée en janvier 2021, intitulée «***Vers un cadre qualitatif permettant de combiner équité et excellence dans la transformation de l'enseignement supérieur sud-africain afin de parvenir au développement***», dans laquelle la promotion de la réussite des étudiants est considérée comme centrale à la transformation institutionnelle. L'objectif de l'étude était de contribuer à un cadre qualitatif plus complet pour la transformation de l'enseignement supérieur en Afrique du Sud en conciliant les notions d'équité et d'excellence. Des entretiens ont été menés avec seize leaders du secteur de l'enseignement supérieur en Afrique du Sud et les données issues de ces entretiens ont ensuite été triangulées avec les documents stratégiques de différentes entités œuvrant à la transformation de l'enseignement supérieur. Le cadre théorique englobe les théories du capital humain et des capacités humaines et plaide en faveur d'une harmonisation de ces théories afin de promouvoir la justice sociale et le bien-être humain. L'étude a utilisé des méthodes de théorie ancrée pour analyser et présenter le cadre qualitatif global. L'étude a révélé que la réussite des étudiants était le facteur le plus important de la transformation institutionnelle. En outre, quatre autres éléments interdépendants ont été présentés comme étant les éléments essentiels d'un cadre global. Sur la base de ces résultats, cet article explore davantage les implications pour les des œuvres estudiantines en utilisant des données inédites recueillies par l'auteur lors de conversations réflexives avec des parties prenantes de l'Université du Cap. Dans ce contexte, la notion d'un ensemble d'impératifs d'apprentissage des étudiants (compétences des diplômés) devient pertinente dans la discussion lorsque les praticiens et chercheurs du secteur des œuvres estudiantines collaborent avec le corps enseignant et les départements sur des projets stratégiques.

MOTS-CLÉS
Équité, excellence, compétences des diplômés, théorie du capital humain, approche par les capacités, réussite des étudiants, praticiens en affaires étudiantes, chercheurs en affaires étudiantes, justice sociale, transformation universitaire

Introduction

Student affairs practitioners and researchers typically oversee holistic student support, student development, and governance activities. Further, they are generally responsible for the institutional policies, processes, and systems that ultimately create optimal environmental conditions to encourage student success. These activities are embedded in a culture that promotes the twin imperatives of *excellence* and *equity*. This ethos is derived from the transformation objective in the 1997 South African 'White paper on higher education' (Department of Education [DoE], 1997). The report sought to effect systemic changes to achieve both excellence and equity and put forward arguments for the feasibility of achieving the two simultaneously. In the years since, work has continued to purposefully initiate the dismantling of structures, processes, laws, and policies that were purposefully designed to govern an apartheid state.

At the start of this process, there were intensive debates about the trajectory of the transformation of higher education. I position this debate in a theoretical conceptualisation based in human capital theory (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2013) and human capabilities theory (Nussbaum, 1997; Sen, 1999). The former champions 'education for the market', and the latter 'education for human flourishing'. Both have implications for understanding the role of higher education in society. The study presents five key pillars for institutional transformation, which together make up a framework for transformation that reconciles excellence and equity (Badat, 2016; Wolpe, 1995), opening up the discussion on the role of student

affairs in the broader higher education transformation project. I argue that when there is collaboration between student affairs and other stakeholders, new opportunities arise to reconcile equity and excellence, shedding light on how they are interconnected. Student affairs practitioners and researchers can actively shape a learning environment and can be instrumental in leveraging the five pillars of transformation for student success.

Human capital theory and human capabilities theory

The perspectives and beliefs of student affairs practitioners and researchers about their work directly informs their approaches and choices. Theoretical constructs influence the lenses through which we make such choices about what we teach and learn, and the value we assign to different learning imperatives and the vast array of other responsibilities involved in a student-centred approach.

I used human capital theory (OECD, 2013, 2017) and human capabilities theory (Sen, 1999) as frameworks. Like the views of South African thought leaders, these theories may initially appear oppositional, but examining their underlying meanings and assumptions can reveal more complementarity. When providing an education that promotes high-level market-related skills and competencies, there is a similar emphasis on providing an education that people deem worthwhile, one that impacts not only the formal workspace but also individuals and society. Regarding the latter, social justice ideas feature prominently regarding the broader capabilities that universities should develop in graduates. This is crucial in South Africa, considering the persistence of economic and other inequalities, far beyond the political dismantling of apartheid.

Human capital theory utilises metrics of economic investment to measure the capital invested in the higher education endeavour as a way to measure its worth. Education's worth is measured as the monetary return on investment (Peters & Besley, 2006), in other words, value is measured mainly through productivity rates. Thus, measures of excellence are calculated and embedded predominantly in market-related activities, with the worth of industry and economic growth directly related to education's worth and these measures serving as the primary indicators of what constitutes excellence. Thus, transformation and excellence are considered solely in market-related terms. The emphasis is on quality, as defined by global industry, and this is the dominant mode of thinking in assessing the worth and desired outcomes of investment in higher education. Notably, these views indicate the complexity of dealing with theoretical constructs, which are complex and exist on a continuum.

In contrast, and in some ways consistent with human capital theory, human capabilities theory has a far broader understanding of education, with human well-being and flourishing as its ultimate goals. It views higher education as a vehicle that can promote human well-being (Walker et. al, 2022), with a focus on social justice (Odora Hoppers & Richards, 2012), of which inclusivity and equity are derivatives and desirable, as is market-related skills and competencies only insofar as these are conducted to promote the flourishing of an entire population. Thus, in this perspective, quality and excellence are defined somewhat differently.

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Progress toward the objective of human flourishing appears to be harder to measure than the achievement of human well-being, but this may also be changing. There is a trend towards a balance between factors that preface human capabilities theory and human capital theory. In the current globalized world, with its interconnected political, economic, and social systems, it is necessary to recognise both the success of market-related education (capital) as well as the human flourishing and social justice aspects of education (capabilities) as valid and interrelated. Here, this study contributes significantly to the literature. The ways in which education is conceptualised in the literature – relating to human capital theory and human capabilities theory – are often mutually exclusive. That is, as currently conceptualised, human capital theory does not incorporate crucial conceptualisations of human capabilities theory, and vice versa. I will show that aspects of human capital theory and human capabilities theory should be integrated to form a new conceptual framework for student success. To this end, the five core pillars of transformation are founded on the premise that an education system should encapsulate both excellence (human capital theory) and equity (human capabilities theory) if it is to be geared towards sustainability and development.

I sought to understand the qualitative elements of institutional transformation that reconcile excellence and equity in higher education to facilitate development. Five pillars of transformation emerged, providing a comprehensive framework for institutional transformation. I expound on this finding by exploring its direct bearing on how student affairs practitioners and researchers may be further positioned to formulate strategic plans to foster institutional transformation through student success.

Methodology

This is a qualitative research study from an interpretive perspective. The aim was to include an elite sample of 10 to 15 participants (Cresswell, 2009). To avoid repetitiveness and thus depreciation of data collection value, I interviewed 16 participants, in line with Cresswell's saturation point. Qualitative information of the 16 participants' insights and learnings over the past 20 years was gathered systematically using in-depth, semi-structured interviews, which I analysed using grounded theory techniques.

The research design involved the selection of 16 recognised leaders in the transformation of higher education. For a grounded theory sample, I selected a subset of these social actors to be representative of the whole – a purposive sampling method. I selected the participants based on their expert knowledge and strategic experience in the transformation of higher education in South Africa. The questions that emerged early on determined who would be interviewed next. One-on-one personal interviews were conducted in person where possible, or telephonically if participants resided in other parts of the country or were travelling. The study was approved in 2017 by the University of Cape Town (UCT) Research Ethics Review Committee (School of Education, Faculty of Humanities). Interviews were conducted from mid-2017 to late 2018. Follow-up interviews were held with two participants, one for further in-depth exploration of their responses, and the other to complete the interview. Thus, 16 semi-structured interviews were conducted.

The interview data were triangulated using a document data-gathering process (adapted from Adam, 2009, p. 58), using selected strategic documents from organisations such as the OECD, the International Monetary Fund (2017), the Department of Higher Education (1997), and the Department of Labour (2007).

The 16 experts were of diverse background and comprised an elite sample. Collectively, they provided an understanding of the transformation of higher education that spanned decades of leadership, drawing on rich personal perspectives arising from their academic and leadership accomplishments in the field. According to Creswell (2009, p. 182) when dealing with complex notions such as *transformation*, new knowledge is best created using qualitative methods:

> *Having thus established that a qualitative design would be followed to elicit and explore the knowledge creation process with regard to the participants' thoughts, views, and beliefs about the world, what follows is an assessment of various applicable methods. The research strategy comprises four methods particular to the qualitative knowledge creation process.*

In this regard, grounded theory is used to construct knowledge using qualitative data following clear stages that correlate to positivist methodologies through the combination of similar terms. Birks and Mills (2011, p. 90) provide a review of the approaches of key grounded theorists, including Glaser and Strauss (1967) as well as Glaser (1987). They describe a five-stage process: (1) coding, (2) transition from open to axial coding, and (3) selective coding. This progression hinges on the axial coding framework, in which open codes are assigned to certain theoretical aspects, such as conditions, interaction, strategies, tactics, and consequences. The axial coding process seeks to (4) identify key variables that will make up the theoretical framework. Assigning codes in the broad axial framework will lead to (5) further definition of these in relation to variables that emerge through the axial coding process. Thus, a theoretical framework is obtained from this process.

I first analysed the data and categorised them into concepts, each of which bore direct relevance to the research question. I then analysed the concepts in relation to the research question and further categorised these into themes. Creswell (2009, p. 185) guided me to use grounded theory to analyse the raw data that reflect the views, opinions, and beliefs about a complex social phenomenon by coding and subsequently categorising these into themes. Further, and for the purpose of developing a theoretical qualitative framework for the transformation of higher education, Glaser (2002) states that grounded theory emphasises the complexity of the world and the necessity to exercise freedom and autonomy; it allows one to "generate theory that explains what is going on in the world, starting with substantive areas" (Glaser, 2002, p. 2).

I categorised the data via coding and emerging themes to construct a meta-theory or meta-framework (Henning, 2011), using the themes that emerged from the gathered data to formulate concepts on which to base the theoretical or qualitative framework. The development of concepts for analytical purposes is a vital step in the process. Birks and Mills (2011, p. 89) elaborate on this as follows:

> *[Grounded theory] defines a concept as a descriptive or explanatory idea, its meaning embedded in a word, label or symbol. Differences between how concepts operate in a grounded theory relate to their function in the analytical process and levels of sophistication, both of which are interconnected.*

In sum, I used a qualitative approach, deeming the strategy of employing grounded theory as suitable for re-conceptualising how equity and excellence can be coherently represented in an expanded qualitative framework for transformation.

Further, I conducted informal interviews with 16 colleagues at UCT to understand how this principle of alignment could contribute directly to student support.

Findings

The data revealed five core pillars of transformation (Figure 1).

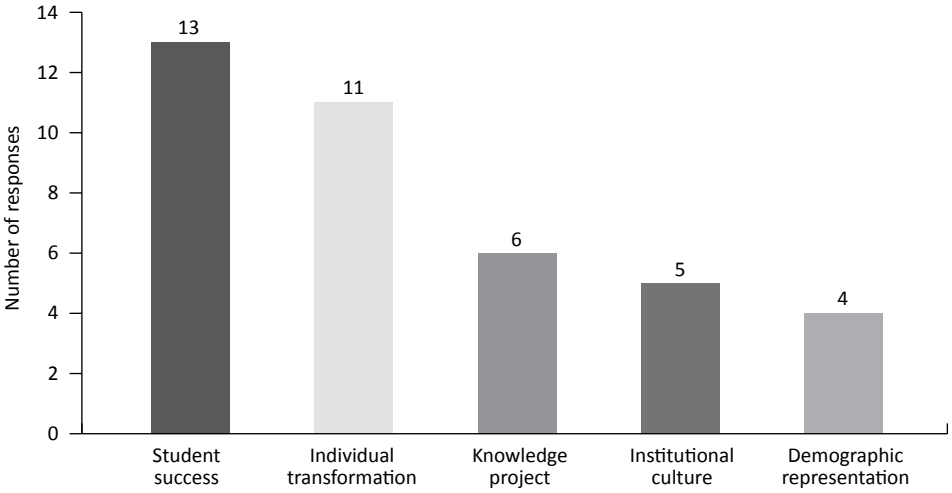

Figure 1: The five core pillars of institutional transformation

Note: The y-axis reflects the total number of respondents who highlighted these areas as crucial to transformation.

As seen in Figure 1, student success was regarded as the most important of the five pillars. The interviewees stated that a key indicator of the success of higher education transformation is the extent to which students have succeeded. To date, student success, measured as the number of students awarded degrees, remains racially skewed. This raises questions around effective teaching and learning strategies for a diverse student body, as well as the viability of the curriculum structure and content. The participants raised concerns about the imbalance between investments in research and in optimising teaching and learning strategies to enhance throughput. Greater in-depth qualitative work is needed to understand a curriculum's impacts and its relationship to effective strategies for teaching, learning, and assessment, since these are fundamental areas of transformation that must be adapted to promote excellence and equity.

Although in the original study (see January, 2021) student success was rated the highest, it should be viewed as one part of a set of core interrelated factors that drive transformation. I focus on the relationship between curriculum change and student success. This raises questions about how institutions can foster student success by examining the knowledge project out of which issues such as decolonising the curriculum arise. In the study, the South African Knowledge Project was also viewed as a key driver for institutional transformation. This relates to the type of knowledge that should be generated by the institution to address local, national, regional, and global imperatives as well as to the co-creation of knowledge and the ownership and beneficiaries of the knowledge-creation process. The purposeful transformation of the institutional culture will remain a key area of collaboration between student affairs and other institutional stakeholders. Demographic representation will also remain vital if collaboration is to be meaningful and inclusive. As transformation progresses, institutions will increasingly need to reflect a country's demographics.

Further analysis is needed of the institutional strategies that must be developed to achieve an optimal learning environment and, therefore, student success (see Figure 2). I outline eight subthemes that contribute to student success. Drawing on change models, 'lessons from business', the study holds that if transformation is to be achieved, indicators must be developed that are unique to the settings and time in which institutional partners collaborate to establish interventions deemed worthwhile for their transformation processes.

Implications

This theoretical framework describes transformation with respect to the university's roles in society and uses this positioning to highlight insights into the ways in which the relationship between excellence and equity are framed. The study reflects that the South African leaders I interviewed were aware of the need to balance the human capital and the human capabilities approaches, noting that the neoliberal market and its democratisation were beyond the control of the developmental state and were driven primarily by global capitalist interests. In this regard, the tensions between global and national interests intersect.

From the perspective of transforming towards nation-building, the system's transformation aspirations place demands on universities to move beyond being instruments for the market, towards being creators and contributors to the knowledge project which seeks to transform society's injustices and inequities. Institutions invested in transformative education and curriculum reform aspire towards providing students greater epistemological access, being uniquely African, and working to benefit society. The assumption is that such reform would enable student success, given appropriate support. In such a transformed system, optimal allocation of funding would result in higher education producing knowledge which, although generated for global consumption, would primarily benefit the communities from which it originates as well as society.

Figure 2: Elements of a comprehensive qualitative framework

Student affairs practitioners would benefit from a conceptual framework for their services, which are located in the institutional strategic framework, by leveraging institutional partnerships for student success. A participant noted: "… the rubric of the 1994 process is what we probably call transformation and I think it is time for us to think quite hard of a new rubric. For me the rubric is really a social justice rubric" (January, 2021, p. 158).

Once the framework is strategically aligned, practitioners can begin to assign resources to realise student success, and institutional indicators could be derived from existing frameworks to assess student affairs' contributions to a university's strategy. Coherence between the five pillars of transformation can be achieved when these are aligned to the institution's vision and mission (see Figure 3).

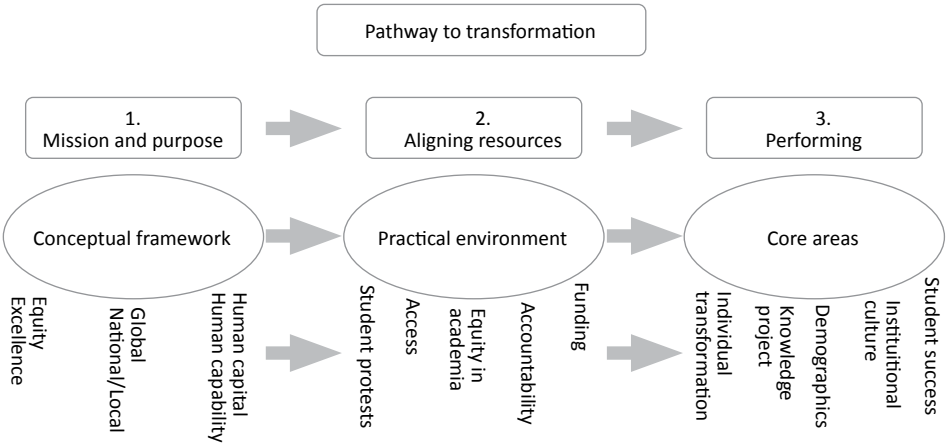

Figure 3: From conceptual framework to core pillars of transformation

In sum, student success hinges on other core pillars of transformation, including the production of knowledge, individual transformation, demographic representativity, and institutional culture. In outside-of-the-classroom learning, student affairs practitioners have crucial roles to play in empowering young people to be of service to social justice, human rights, and other frameworks that promote human well-being while achieving academic success.

Developing a model for holistic transformation

The five pillars of transformation are interrelated. This implies that, when one addresses student success, one must ensure that the curriculum, demographics, and other elements of the framework are addressed simultaneously. Different functions in an institution should contribute in unique ways that are purpose-driven and strategically aligned. As student development seeks to contribute to student success, this element of the transformative framework is critical to student affairs and to faculties in direct and specific ways. I consulted colleagues in the faculty to broadly explore this notion.

I will now return to the study's implications by exploring how such collaboration can be operationalised. I drew on work done in the UCT Office of Residence Life (UCT: Residence Life, 17 May 2022, unpublished), where 16 internal stakeholders reflected on the power of synergies within the university ecosystem. This approach to the work sought to promote inclusivity, collaboration, and the conversation about student success. The summary of the key themes that emerged from these conversations illustrates the power of collaboration and the nature of the innovative work that lies ahead to strengthen a holistic learning environment at a university. It also invites researchers to formally research students' needs and how these can be resolved and addressed by aligning resources.

A student affairs practitioner in the residence sector reflected on ways to collaborate and strengthen the learning environment outside the classroom. In Figure 3, I reflected on how the residential environment can be shaped to contribute to the university's strategic objectives (Figure 4), to understand how synergies could close perceived gaps in student life and student governance and thereby help align student affairs services to the university's strategic objectives. Thus, we can work toward "unleashing human potential to create a fair and just society" (University of Cape Town, Vision 2030, p. 1), with an expanded notion of student success, as I propose.

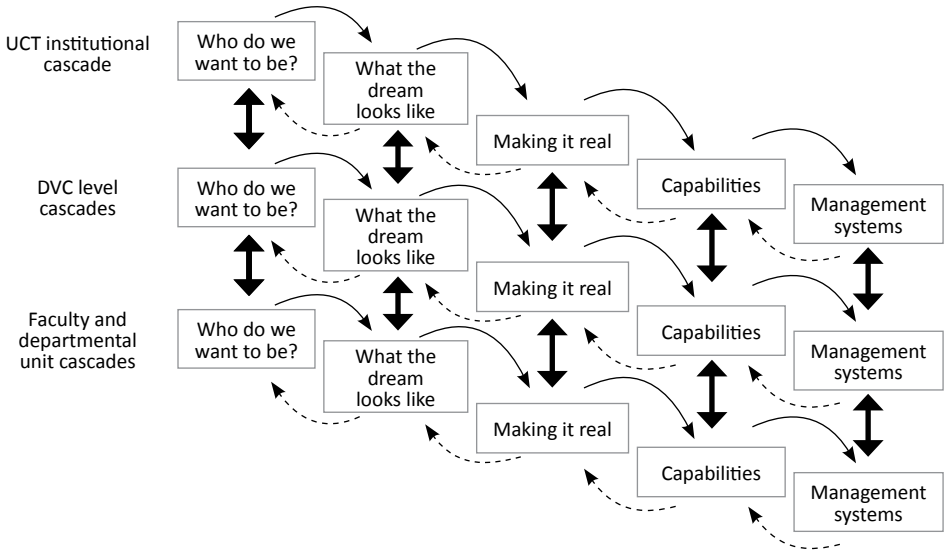

Figure 4: UCT's cascading model for strategic planning (UCT Vision 2030, p. 6)

In the university ecosystem, reflections on the value of collaboration between faculty and student affairs staff have given rise to creative solutions to streamline, align, and adapt existing services so as to create a seamless learning environment between in-the-classroom and out-of-the-classroom learning. Schreiber et al. (2021, p. vi) describe the learning needs of a massified higher education system as follows:

> *… there is also increased pressure for efficiency, relevance, and success, to ensure that students are equipped with relevant knowledge, skills, and competencies, develop personally and socio-culturally, and success academically, by making successful transitions into and through higher education and into the world of work and livelihoods.*

In this example, a stakeholder from the academic sector highlighted the possibility of linking needs to existing activities. For instance, if the mathematics department provides tutors that are paid for as 'hot seats' during the day, this may be extended, so that residence societies do not need to pay for their own tutors in the evening. Other suggestions included extending invitations to day students and faculty members to join initiatives, as well as formalising relationships between the College of Music and Drama Department to promote active participation in these spaces. Academic support services may offer online training for students interested in initiating writing clubs. There are a great many possibilities for collaboration.

While the interviewees' opinions provided valuable insights into the possibilities that may emerge through collaboration, more in-depth research is required to gain a deep and thorough understanding of how to create an optimal learning environment outside the classroom to promote student success. One key area of collaboration is research. The sector is guided by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) to promote research in the following aspects of Student Housing and Residence Life (DHET, 2011, pp. xix–xx):

> *Role of Residences in the Academic Project*
> - *Research needs to be conducted to explore ways in which the social and cultural milieu in residence systems impacts upon the ability of black working-class students to succeed academically.*
> - *Research needs to be conducted to explore the broad and complex relationship between student housing and academic success.*
> - *Residences must become an integral part of the academic project and promoted as sites of academic endeavour.*

The insights garnered from collaboration with academic colleagues and the recommended research focus areas outlined above form a basis for collaboration between student affairs and faculty members. Further, the notion of student success must be jointly defined. In relation to holistic learning, student learning imperatives (SLI) is a key concept when designing a university as a learning organisation. This is an approach to student development that centres learning. It seeks to create a seamless learning environment on campuses by establishing a shared language and joint outcomes for learning, based on collaboration between development and academic staff. In this approach, the duality between out-of-the-classroom and in-the-classroom learning is largely overcome as students engage in purposeful learning activities throughout campus. These terms were coined in 1986 by Brown and associates, who led the Tomorrow's Higher Education (THE) Project (Evans, 1998). Proponents of major

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reforms in higher education student development in the late 20th century, led by student personnel utilising human development theory, argued that the shared cause for academics and development practitioners is learning. The notion of putting learning first sought to overcome the dichotomy between academic and development staff. A primary assumption that underlies SLI is that,

> *If learning is the primary measure of institutional productivity by which the quality of undergraduate education is determined, what and how much students learn also must be the criteria by which the value of student affairs is judged. (Calhoun, 1996, p. 115)*

According to King and Magolda (1999, p. 1), the SLI framework seeks to develop graduates who possess:

> *(a) complex cognitive skills such as reflection and critical thinking; (b) an ability to apply knowledge to practical problems encountered in one's vocation, family, or other areas of life; (c) an understanding and appreciation of human differences; (d) practical competence skills (e.g., decision making, conflict resolution); and (e) a coherent integrated sense of identity, self-esteem, confidence, integrity, aesthetic sensibilities, and civic responsibility.*

This type of education would result in a new discourse that is consistent with the needs of the time. It is an example of best practice, where education helps to create well-being and peace, and where everyone's rights are respected.

Implementing the SLI is critical to student success (January, 2007, pp. 124–125). This may be achieved by building systems that promote equity and excellence at all levels, and identifying the human capital, human capabilities, and other resources required to enable such change. The elements of this framework enable institutions to take a theoretical position on how human capital theory and human capabilities theory can be integrated so as to achieve harmony between excellence and equity by contributing to:

- A collective vision.
- The recognition of past achievements to promote excellence and equity.
- A re-focus on current key imperatives.
- Creativity and innovation.
- The value of a multiplicity of assessment methods.
- The optimal use of funds.

From the perspective of collaboration between student affairs and faculties, one sees an evolving notion of student success, as reflected on by Nelson Mandela, and cited in Speckman and Mandew (2014, p. 64):

> *It would be narrow-minded to reduce the 'quality of the graduates' that Scott et al. mention to employability only. A broadened view should include preparing graduates for vibrant careers to enable them to make a meaningful contribution to society as responsible citizens.*

When utilised to develop both our human capital (marketable skills) and human capabilities (the ability to live a life we consider worthwhile), these experiences can be blended to promote the well-being of individuals and society. However, the transformation of higher education is founded on the formulation of empirically based models that are developed collectively within the institution. Reflective instruments, based on an agreed upon set of indicators, could guide reflection sessions, such that the outcomes of analyses of the data belong to the university community. Communities of practice could devise tools that help them measure their performance. Participatory research and reflection methods also allow for a rich exploration of the factors that promote student success, with students' voices shaping the conversation.

Conclusion and recommendations

I have explored the interconnected learning and success-driven relationship between institutional transformation and student success. I identified five core pillars that student affairs practitioners can leverage when promoting a transformative learning environment for student success. Student success can be framed broadly to encapsulate human capital/workplace skills and human capabilities/holistic development skills. The four remaining pillars should also benefit from an integrative perspective between human capabilities theory and human capital theory when human flourishing and social justice become the underlying principles. Further research is needed to fully draw out this finding's implications. This approach is based on the notion that a university comprises a variety of ecosystems in which student affairs professionals have key roles in conceptualising and formulating relationship-building based on shared principles and values. Thus, the university would recognise that fostering positive relationships between stakeholders is paramount to student flourishing and well-being. In their roles, various stakeholders will have opportunities to advance both human capital and human capabilities for institutional and societal development. In this regard, I addressed some conceptual limitations in the literature. The capabilities that students develop through active engagement and service enrich an ecosystem and allow for new knowledge to emerge, promoting human well-being and flourishing. Thus, I have re-defined student success regarding how the knowledge acquired by a student in their formal curriculum is applied and enhanced through active engagement and service toward the betterment of society. Exploring notions of decoloniality, humanity, spiritual excellence, and other humanistic themes will significantly enhance market-related skills taught in the classroom.

Notably, much work is necessary to enhance this framework to make it a useful contribution to the monitoring of progress along the transformation journey. While systems and processes are well-established in the sector and much work has gone into creating an enabling environment for transformation, more work is needed in key focus areas to achieve the set equity and excellence objectives.

Ethics statement

Ethical approval was given in 2017 by the University of Cape Town's Humanities Faculty Research Ethics Committee. Participant confidentiality and anonymity were maintained at all stages of the study.

Potential conflict of interest

The author reports no conflict of interest.

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REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

Using a student organisation to promote student-centredness at a South African university

Utiliser une organisation d'étudiants pour promouvoir le centrage sur l'étudiant dans une université sud-africaine

Rishen Roopchund[1] & Naadhira Seedat[2]

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ABSTRACT

This reflective article focuses on the Chemical Engineering Students Association (CESA) at a South African university, which was established as a voluntary student organisation to alleviate the problems of student isolation and inadequate orientation programmes by promoting student-centredness and development. The article aims to examine CESA's role in promoting student-centredness and to highlight CESA's role in community engagement. CESA was initiated by two lecturers in the chemical engineering department who served as departmental representatives. Following the Gibbs reflective cycle, data in the form of reflections were collected and analysed from the CESA departmental representatives to ascertain CESA's effectiveness in alleviating the problem of student isolation by creating a student-centred environment and engaging students in community service. The community engagement activities consisted of a Nelson Mandela Day stationery drive and a Women's Day sanitary towel drive to contribute to a local women's and children's shelter. The students actively participated in these activities, demonstrating their commitment to social responsibility and community service. CESA also organised various student development activities to equip students with essential skills and knowledge for their future careers. The students actively participated in these workshops, showing a keen interest in their personal and professional growth. Successfully implementing CESA was made possible through collaboration and support from other faculty members in the chemical engineering department, and the university's community engagement and marketing departments. The article emphasises CESA's practical contributions and presents it as a model for other institutions in establishing effective student organisations. Overall, the reflections indicated CESA's effectiveness in promoting student-centredness.

KEYWORDS

Student organisations, community engagement, student leadership development, student-centredness, social responsiveness

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article de réflexion porte sur l'Association des étudiants en génie chimique (CESA) d'une université sud-africaine, qui a été créée en tant qu'organisation d'étudiants bénévoles visant à atténuer les problèmes d'isolement des étudiants et d'inadéquation des programmes d'orientation

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en promouvant le centrage et le développement des étudiants. L'article vise à examiner le rôle de la CESA dans la promotion du centrage sur l'étudiant et à souligner le rôle de la CESA dans l'engagement communautaire. La CESA a été initiée par deux membres personnel enseignant du département de génie chimique agissant en tant que représentants du département. Suivant le cycle de réflexion de Gibbs, des données sous forme de réflexions ont été recueillies auprès des représentants départementaux de la CESA puis analysées afin de vérifier l'efficacité de la CESA à atténuer le problème de l'isolement des étudiants en créant un environnement centré sur l'étudiant et en impliquant les étudiants dans le service à la communauté. Les activités d'engagement communautaire ont consisté en une collecte de papeterie à l'occasion de la Journée Nelson Mandela et une collecte de serviettes hygiéniques à l'occasion de la Journée de la femme, au profit d'un centre d'accueil local pour les femmes et les enfants. Les étudiants ont participé activement à ces activités, démontrant ainsi leur engagement en matière de responsabilité sociale et de service à la communauté. La CESA a également organisé diverses activités de développement destinées aux étudiants afin de les doter de compétences et de connaissances essentielles pour leurs futures carrières. Les étudiants ont participé activement à ces ateliers, montrant un vif intérêt pour leur développement personnel et professionnel. Le succès de la mise en œuvre de la CESA a été rendu possible grâce à la collaboration et au soutien d'autres membres personnel enseignant du département de génie chimique, ainsi que des départements d'engagement communautaire et de marketing de l'université. Cet article met l'accent sur les contributions pratiques de la CESA et la présente comme un modèle pour la création des associations des étudiants efficaces dans d'autres institutions. Dans l'ensemble, les réflexions démontrent l'efficacité de la CESA dans la promotion du centrage sur l'étudiant.

MOTS-CLÉS
Organisations étudiantes, engagement communautaire, développement du leadership étudiant, centré sur l'étudiant, responsabilité sociale

Introduction

The Chemical Engineering Students Association: Background and mission

Student isolation remains a problem in the higher education environment, as it negatively impacts students' success rates and employability after graduation (Lim & Vignarajah, 2018). To help alleviate this problem, the Chemical Engineering Students Association (CESA) was formally re-established in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown by two lecturers. Sensing the students' isolation during the lockdown, CESA aimed to establish a sense of connectedness and community among the students. As a voluntary organisation, only interested students were admitted. During the lockdown (2020 and 2021), an online module was created to communicate with the students through shared announcements and facilitate discussions regarding funding and graduate employment opportunities. CESA has two goals: to coordinate and promote student events, and to function as a liaison between students and lecturers in the department, to ensure that any issues between students and lecturers are amicably resolved. After the lockdown was lifted, CESA held its first physical interactions. Two class representatives were voted from each undergraduate year, while two honours students were voted as CESA chair-people to facilitate the student events. These events include community engagement, peer mentorship programmes, and student development and support programmes. The community engagement initiatives include donation drives to collect stationery, clothing, and sanitary towels to support a local women and children's shelter. We

argue that CESA helps to create a sense of community among students, thus promoting student-centredness.

Significance of CESA and impact on student development

Orientation programmes and first-year seminars are transient strategies to help students acquaint with their new peers, lecturers, and the higher education learning environment. Considering that orientation generally occurs in one day, new students may not have adequate time and focus to fully grasp the nuances of the higher education terrain – which is vastly different to that of high school. The 'small fish in a big pond' require additional measures of much-needed support, guidance, and mentorship to excel in their studies and create well-rounded identities for themselves – not just as students, but as future leaders. We argue that the inadequate orientation programmes play a role in student isolation. CESA aids in compensating for the deficiencies of student orientations (Lillis, 2011; Cuseo, 2010). Additionally, CESA helps to promote leadership development (Ferdiansyah & Meutia, 2017) and instilling a sense of social responsibility and impact through community engagement (Bender, 2008), while the student development opportunities aid in career development (Ferdiansyah & Meutia, 2017). These reported deficiencies of student orientations comprise the knowledge gap being addressed in this article.

Aligned with Tinto's theory of educational departure (Tinto, 1986; Schreiber et al., 2014), CESA uses the tool of student engagement to promote academic performance and student-centredness. The theory expounds that if students are adequately engaged in the learning environment – not just in class, but outside as well – they are more likely to foster a desire to succeed. A sense of belonging, individuality, and community is required to promote a student-centred environment that is conducive to students' short- and long-term development and success.

Article purpose and structure

The aims of this article seek to address the problem of the reported deficiencies in traditional student orientation programmes. This reflective practice article firstly aims to examine the role of CESA as a long-term strategy to help students (new and returning) to connect with each other, create a sense of community, and to collaborate with, and seek the mentorship of other students. Second, this article aims to highlight the role of CESA in community engagement involving student participants, and the role of community engagement participation on student leadership within a major South African university. Through these aims, the authors highlight how CESA is used to promote student-centredness, thus alleviating student isolation. As a reflective practice article, the authors' reflections are captured and analysed to ascertain whether CESA can address the deficiencies of student orientation programmes and alleviate student isolation using the Gibbs reflective model. Considering that the authors served as sources of data, no ethical clearance was required in this study. However, reflections were undertaken in relation to the literature and based on the Gibbs reflective model to promote objectivity.

The Gibbs model of reflection

Gibbs (1988) proposed a reflective cycle to guide the process of reflecting after an experience. According to Jasper and Rosser (2013), refection enables learning from experiences, to incorporate the new knowledge to inform future practice (Husebø et al., 2015). The Gibbs reflective cycle is comprised of key questions, which must be answered to yield knowledge from previous experiences by invoking feelings, thoughts, and future recommendations (Husebø et al., 2015). The Gibbs cycle is comprised of six steps: description, feelings, evaluation, analysis, conclusion, and action plan (Gibbs, 1988).

The Gibbs reflective model is integrated into the article's structure by outlining the experiences of the authors as CESA facilitators, their feelings and thoughts, an evaluation and analysis of the overall CESA impacts, and the conclusion and action plan for CESA, enabling a reflection on experiences, outcomes evaluation, and formulation of a future action plan.

Describing the experience of managing CESA

Rishen's experience of CESA's inception and the role of the chairpersons

During the initial lockdown, the CESA interactions were limited to remote and online. Post-lockdown, physical interactions occurred for the first time under the leadership of the new departmental chairpersons. A colleague and I (two new departmental lecturers) served as the departmental chairpersons/representatives, a role which included developing CESA's mission and goals, physically engaging with classes at each year of study to promote CESA, and encouraging students to join, planning, promoting, and facilitating CESA events, and serving as liaisons between the students and lecturers within the department. The main aim underpinning CESA's goals is to cultivate a student-centred environment 'for the students, by the students'. Hence, we were required to innovate and implement methods through which students felt supported, included, cared for, and purposeful. Considering that human beings are social creatures, this notion applies especially to students undertaking a challenging field of study, such as chemical engineering. Hence, we strive to make every student feel included, safe, and comfortable within CESA. Much of the inspiration to achieve such student-centredness stems from our own experiences of shortcomings during our undergraduate studies, which we are actively trying to change, such that the new generation of students feel more 'at ease, and at home'.

Naadhira's experience as the previous (pre-COVID-19) CESA chairperson

As the previous CESA representative from the chemical engineering department, I observed an active student body running the CESA initiatives which were inherited from the previous students. I took over with no handover from the previous department representative, not really knowing the role I should fulfil. Hence, I assisted students by facilitating meetings, booking and organising boardrooms and coordinating the Chemical Engineering Ball and charity initiatives. I assisted students in creating posters and posting around campus for donation drives and the Engineering Ball. My office was the

collection point for the stationery and baby clothes and supplies for the donation drives. Through the offered assistance, I was able to create a safe space for students to come to me to seek help and encouragement, a student-centred environment. Overall, there was a lack of structure in the CESA initiatives, and the previous CESA students were much more 'hands on' than the current ones.

Rishen's initial feelings, thoughts, and expectations as the latter CESA chairperson

Taking over from Naadhira, I was initially unsure where to begin regarding the re-establishment of CESA in the department. I was aware that students were facing isolation amidst the global pandemic, which accentuated the socio-economic challenges faced by most. Hence, I felt pressured to create a reliable 'starting point' which could be improved upon with the passage of time. Considering that teaching and research responsibilities are the dominant key performance areas for academics, the pressure to succeed in creating a glimmer of student-centredness through CESA was overwhelming. It was important that this starting point would also become a tangible gesture to enable the remote students feel an immediate sense of connection to each other, and a sense of belonging to the department, faculty, and institution. Throughout the lockdown, I ran the online organisation like a blog, in which I would post announcements regarding useful funding, bursary and graduate employment opportunities. I hoped that students would perceive my posts as messages from someone who cared for their development, future success, and overall well-being. My line manager instructed that CESA required a formal grounding, such that if I left the institution, another colleague could easily take over. Hence, when the lockdown was lifted, another colleague was recruited as the second CESA (co-)chairperson to help formalise the structure, and aid in implementing physical events.

Challenges in forming and developing CESA

An overview of the main challenges in forming and developing CESA, along with their corresponding mitigation factors are shown in Table 1, based on reflections by the CESA departmental representatives.

Table 1: Challenges in forming and developing CESA

Challenge	Description
Lack of structure	The CESA departmental representatives experienced a lack of formal guidelines for student associations. As such, they found it stressful to balance interventions that could potentially help the students, while remaining within the vicinity of the university's strategic objectives. In other words, the student organisation must strive to create and promote student-centredness, while aligning with the university's strategic objectives. Careful thought and planning were required to ensure such alignment, which included consultations between the departmental CESA representatives and the department head (internally) (to ensure that CEAS's goals aligned with the university's strategic objectives), the community engagement department (externally) (to help plan community engagement projects and ensure alignment with the university's policies), and the faculty's marketing team (to help plan and promote CESA events).

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Challenge	Description
Lack of time	Academics are preoccupied with teaching and research throughout the year, while students are busy studying and preparing for assessments. As an academic, it is indeed difficult to devote time to facilitate CESA. However, we began to note CESA's impact on students' development, leadership, and overall involvement within CESA. Some students respond seriously to communications and physical meetings. They also show up when help is needed to coordinate CESA events. Such engagement is important in their development into caring, compassionate future leaders. We believe that awakening such compassion and humanity in students will prevent them from undertaking any unethical or unjust practices in the industry. These intrinsic experiences kept us motivated to work on CESA.
Lack of recognition	Running a student organisation generally does not receive adequate recognition. Even if it does, such recognition certainly does not equate to that of research or teaching achievements (in that order of priority) in the scorecards. However, part of being an academic is to develop students to become future leaders. Such a task cannot be achieved solely through in-class learning. Hence, sharing the positive experiences of student organisations can motivate other academics to undertake similar practices, and perceive the value of such.
Lack of financial support	Unless academics do not specifically request a budget to undertake CESA activities and events, budgets are not readily available. Even so, requesting a budget requires effort to source quotations from suppliers – additional administrative work, over and above the dominant research and teaching responsibilities of an academic. To mitigate this challenge, it is helpful to co-run a student organisation with another or a group of interested colleagues to share the additional administrative work.

Describing the planning and execution of CESA activities

The typical CESA events/activities include community engagement, peer mentorship, student development, awards and recognition. Each activity is conceptualised by the CESA departmental representatives. Once the details are finalized, they are presented to the department head for approval. Once the approval is obtained, flyers are created to promote the events, which are then posted to the online CESA group. A meeting is then set to clarify and guide the CESA students regarding their participation. The CESA student representatives for each year, and the student chairpersons then further delegate responsibilities among the CESA students. The student leaders are consulted to ensure that things are 'on track' and that challenges are dealt with. Development aspects such as leadership, communication, and management attributes (planning, organising, leading and controlling) are inherently passed down from the CESA academic coordinators to the student representatives through this structure. The sense of involvement aids in student retention.

Feelings and thoughts

Reflection on personal experiences as the chairpersons

Rishen's reflections

I often reflect on my unpleasant experiences as an engineering undergraduate student. Many of my colleagues agree that studying engineering was a 'cold and clinical' experience with zero to very limited engagement with other students or lecturers. Reflecting on my own undergraduate experiences, many were very stressful. There were times when I was severely depressed and distraught due to the lack of support and motivation. Based on my experiences, I wanted to create an entirely different learning environment for my students. I want them to feel heard, supported, and cared for. I also wanted my students to feel confident, purposeful, motivated, encouraged, and feel like individuals who are established within a community – not just as numbers. Based on these core values, first, I teach the way I wanted to be taught. Second, I try to create a fun, light-hearted and supportive student community through CESA. I believe that helping the less fortunate is a value that all South Africans can relate to, in the spirit of ubuntu. Hence, I implemented community engagement as one of CESA's pillars. Through community engagement, the local community benefits from the combined efforts of students and staff, while the students benefit from a sense of connection with their fellow students, and their lecturers. For me, it is important to break down the barriers between students and lecturers. I believe that students can only learn when they start to perceive their lecturers as older versions of themselves. Such perceived relations can inspire students to believe in the potential within themselves. After all, their lecturers were once in the same phase of life as them.

My overall experiences as a CESA co-chairperson/department representative have been positive. Despite the challenges, I remain motivated and committed to working with and through CESA to positively impact my students. Through CESA, I get to develop my own students (second year) and those in other years of study. I also become familiar with first-year students, build a rapport with them, and look forward to teaching them in second year. As a new academic, I joined the university just before the pandemic lockdowns. Hence, I did not get the opportunity to engage with my colleagues and establish myself in the department for almost two years of the lockdown. Hence, CESA also gave me a chance to find my purpose in the department, and to connect with my colleagues and students in my role as a co-chairperson.

Naadhira's reflections

As the previous CESA departmental representative, I had an overall positive experience although maybe not entirely making the greatest impact we could have. The greatest benefit was working with students from all years of study and facilitating and assisting them in their CESA projects. I was able to create relationships with students that have now become colleagues and friends. CESA ran very few initiatives with two charity drives and a Chemical Engineering Ball as well as awards for the best lecturers every year. Students looked forward to the awards and ball as social highlights of the year.

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Evaluating the impact of CESA activities on participants and the community

Last year, CESA facilitated a stationery collection drive in honour of Nelson Mandela Day and a sanitary towel drive for Women's month. The combined drives culminated in the collection of 70 packs of sanitary towels, at least four bags of clothing, and some stationery items, which were donated to a local women and children's shelter. An official handover ceremony took place towards the end of the year, where the donations were presented to the founder of the identified shelter. The event was attended by the faculty's marketing coordinator, the university's community engagement representative, the chemical engineering department head, the chemical engineering CESA co-chairs, and the CESA students. After each of the esteemed guests reflected on their experiences in the pilot drives, the founder of the shelter expressed her gratitude by indicating that the donated items were much needed and welcomed. During the emotional event, all the attendees experienced the social impact of their contributions to the local community and vowed to try harder to secure more donations in the forthcoming drives. Growing up in a tough economic climate and being plagued by social ills, such as substance abuse and gender-based violence, both staff and students valued the positive impacts made through CESA's community engagement initiatives.

Last year, an informal workshop was held on developing good LinkedIn profiles to help students who were near completion of their studies to possibly market themselves and secure employment using LinkedIn as a professional networking platform. Almost none of the students had previous experiences with LinkedIn, and asked questions, took notes, and requested additional resources. At the end of the workshop, the attendees expressed their gratitude and asked further questions.

Reflecting on the social, and developmental impacts made by CESA's activities last year, Rishen was motivated to build on these experiences and intensify CESA's activities this year by introducing a peer mentoring programme, in which student mentors and mentees volunteer to impart and seek professional and developmental advice from each other.

Analysing personal growth, skills development, and leadership opportunities

CESA provides an opportunity for students to grow as well-rounded contributing members of society by demonstrating that becoming engineers and professionals in the workplace is not on its own an adequate contribution to society. Learning to care for the well-being of the less fortunate and becoming proactive in community engagement even as students without much financial agency, is just as important as contributing to the productivity of a company in their future engineering professions.

Soft skills, such as time management, effective communication, peer collaboration, conflict resolution, and intrinsic learned behaviours, such as compassion and empathy, all contribute to the development of future leaders within CESA.

By joining the CESA community and actively participating in the exciting activities, students are afforded a break from their academic studies in a constructive and fulfilling manner. New students are also afforded a long-term opportunity to integrate into the wider university community and network with senior students for information. Such

opportunities are not possible during the shorter orientation programmes for new students.

Identifying the strengths and weaknesses in managing CESA

Based on the reflections of the CESA departmental representatives, the strengths and weaknesses of managing CESA are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Strengths and weaknesses in managing CESA

Strengths	Weaknesses
The strengths of managing CESA include experiential learning. The initiatives can only improve through reflections of pilot runs.	Networking and relationship building: Student organisations provide avenues to network with peers, faculty, alumni, and professionals in the field, fostering valuable connections and relationships (Dugan & Komives, 2010).
CESA is a fun and exciting organisation that enables working alongside the diverse student population.	Working in a diverse team setting may present challenges related to communication, collaboration, and conflict resolution (Dugan & Komives, 2010). Interpersonal conflicts can arise, requiring effective leadership and conflict management skills.
Managing a student organisation provides opportunities for leadership development, communication skills, teamwork, and organisational abilities (Astin, 1998; Dugan & Komives, 2010; Kuh et al., 2010).	Facilitators involved in student organisations often juggle various roles and responsibilities, which can lead to increased stress and potential burnout (Posner & Brodsky, 1992).
Networking and relationship building: Student organisations provide avenues to network with peers, faculty, alumni, and professionals in the field, fostering valuable connections and relationships (Dugan & Komives, 2010).	Student organisations do not typically receive the same level of recognition and support as teaching or research initiatives within the institution (Posner & Brodsky, 1992). Effort is often required to link organisational activities to teaching and research outcomes.

Evaluation and analysis

Assessing CESA's outcomes and achievements

The four stages in the framework for reflexive evaluation in student engagement (Healey & Jenkins, 2009) were used to guide the CESA departmental representatives' assessment of CESA's outcomes and achievements in Table 3.

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Table 3: Assessment of CESA's outcomes

Stage	Description	Elaboration
1	Describe	This stage documents the observable aspects of CESA, which is comprised of chemical engineering students who join voluntarily. The activities hosted by CESA fall under the broad categories of community engagement, peer mentoring, student development, and student support. CESA's community engagement initiatives occur in partnership with the university's community engagement department. As of last year, physical meetings take place between the students and the department representatives. CESA has a linear structure in the sense that the CESA students report to two student representatives per year of study. All the student representatives report to the student chairpersons, who report to the department representatives/ chairpersons.
2	Analyse	Regarding the observed experiences and interactions, CESA members across every level of the organisation were found to interact meaningfully. During CESA meetings with the department representative, students seem adequately comfortable to speak about their challenges, share their ideas, and add on to others' ideas. Such confidence in themselves, and respect and consideration for others was perceived positively. Students also support engagement by asking questions and seeking clarity when needed. Reflecting on the motivations and power dynamics within CESA, the motivations that drive the organisation include the following: students have a desire to make a difference using their time and resources; students have a desire to succeed and become upstanding members of society; students want to stand out and be recognised for their contributions within the organisation; students recognise that we are connected to each other, hence the displays of altruism; students want to be extraordinary by engaging in activities that the average student overlooks or ignores; students understand the value of CESA's initiatives and want to engage for their own benefit. Voluntarily joining the organisation means that students are motivated in one, or all the above ways. Power dynamics are neutralised within CESA, as everyone (students and staff) share collegial and respectful relationships. Socially, the general CESA student demographic emerges from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, and are culturally and/or religiously inclined, as exhibited in their free, yet respectful behaviour and practices outside academic settings. These students are compassionate and empathetic, which are ideal traits for motivating students to undertake community engagement. Being raised in underprivileged circumstances also drives students to succeed and grab onto opportunities that can expedite their professional development. This scenario also drives students to join CESA and take advantage of the developmental opportunities. Finally, some students are shy and may lack the confidence to speak out about the challenges and issues affecting them. Hence, joining a student association allows them to

Stage	Description	Elaboration
		take a united stand against such or similar issues. From an institutional perspective, the department supports CESA by funding its initiatives – if funding requests are well substantiated and made in advance. These combined factors enable the functioning of CESA.
3	Interpret	Delving into the deeper significance of the experiences and interactions; generally, students believe in 'giving back' which drives them to participate in CESA's community engagement projects. This behaviour was explained to the CESA departmental representatives by the students concerned, when questioned regarding their motivations for participation. This attitude is linked to their socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. Additionally, the students are also motivated to succeed and make good use of every support structure afforded them. Hence, they choose to participate in the developmental aspects. The emotional impacts of charitable work when undertaking community engagement include feeling happy and joyful, fostering empathy and compassion, finding a sense of purpose, and meaning, and gaining a sense of self-esteem and self-worth (Post, 2005; Aknin et al., 2012; Lyubomirsky et al., 2004). These are some of the emotional impacts reported by the CESA students. Socially, students feel integrated into the university, and society. Such feelings of belonging and integration are correlated to student retention (Lillis, 2011). By engaging in CESA's student development activities, students become more well-rounded, and gain deeper insights from fellow and senior students. Such engagements lead to an informal learning environment in which students can seek help from each other with challenging areas.
4	Evaluate	A SWOT analysis is used to reflect on the effectiveness and value of CESA's activities and initiatives. CESA's strengths include the eagerness of the current student participants and the experiential learning gained from the activities piloted thus far. The weaknesses include the time and energy required to participate and run the organization – from students and staff alike. Opportunities include the potential to expand CESA's initiatives to the faculty and university levels. Threats include the lack of resources and budgetary constraints. Based on the SWOT analysis, the strengths and opportunities outweigh the weaknesses and threats.

Evaluating personal development and lessons learned as the chairpersons

Managing CESA has helped the CESA chairpersons to develop several skills: leadership, time management, communication and interpersonal skills, organisational and planning abilities, networking, and relationship building, problem-solving and adaptability, self-confidence and self-efficacy and personal growth and self-reflection (Astin, 1998; Dugan & Komives, 2010; Posner & Brodsky, 1992; Kuh et al., 2010).

One of the biggest lessons learned is that initiatives to create student-centredness do not receive as much recognition as research and teaching related achievements in academia. Hence, effort is required to link CESA's activities and initiatives to teaching

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and research outcomes. According to Lazarus et al. (2008), community engagement combines and integrates service with teaching and research related and applied to identified community development priorities. As such, Figure 1 shows the ways in which community engagement can be linked to other key aspects of academia (Bringle, 1999). Future work will focus on attempting to integrate community engagement as a key CESA activity with research and teaching.

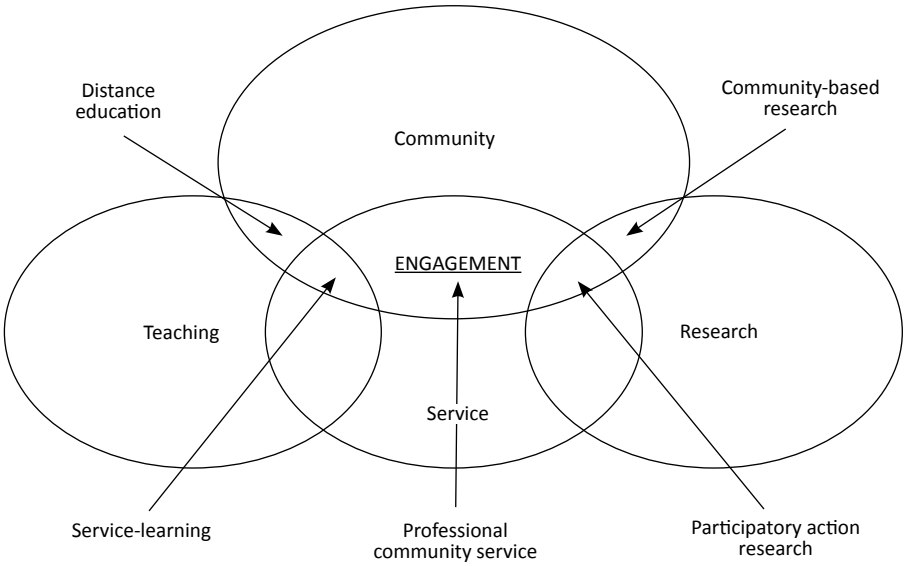

Figure 1: Variations of community engagement (Bringle, 1999)

Discussing the relationship between CESA's activities and student-centredness

CESA uses its initiatives and activities as tools to promote student-centredness and development. Community engagement enables students to apply leadership and organisational skills in the 'real world' and provides a greater sense of personal identity, spirituality, and moral development (Bandy, 2011).

Regarding student development, Chickering and Reisser's (1993) psychosocial development theory outlines seven factors that govern student development: developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, establishing, and clarifying purpose, and developing integrity (Foubert & Urbanski, 2006). Considering that each of these development factors were correlated to students' involvement in student clubs and organisations (Foubert & Urbanski, 2006), it is evident that CESA aids in student development through its student initiatives.

In addition, Magolda and Astin (1993) investigated the effects of students being involved in extra-curricular organisations. The study found that public speaking, leadership, and interpersonal skills correlated strongly with the time students spent participating in student organisations. Magolda and Astin (1993) believed that a

student's peer group greatly influences their cognitive and affective development, as peers can involve each other more intensely in shared experiences (Foubert & Urbanski, 2006). However, it is worth clarifying that positive outcomes are typically only achieved when engaging with 'good quality' peers. In CESA's case, students join voluntarily with the desire to improve themselves and uplift others, thus befitting the "good quality" category. Interactions with peers of such calibre contributes to interpersonal competence, cognitive complexity, and humanitarianism (Kuh, 1995; Terenzini et al., 1996). Comparatively, new students who join student organisations have higher scores on developing purpose than those who do not join (Jackson & Bruegmann, 2009). Hence, getting first-year students to join CESA remains a priority.

Such claims were supported by Foubert and Urbanski (2006) who quantitatively found that participation in student organisations correlated to psychosocial development, in terms of students' purpose, educational involvement, career planning, life management, and cultural participation. Considering that students who participate in student organisations demonstrated higher levels of development (Foubert & Urbanski, 2006), they outlined the significance of creating meaningful involvement opportunities for students, to promote overall development. Hence, the motivation to use experiential learning to ensure CESA's continuous improvement.

Conclusion and action plan

Summarising the key experiences, thoughts, and evaluations of the CESA departmental representatives

The key experiences, thoughts, and evaluations can be summarised as follows: the inception of CESA under the leadership of the departmental chairpersons aimed to create a student-centred environment and address the shortcomings of student isolation and deficient student orientation programmes. The chairperson role involved developing CESA's mission and goals, engaging with students, planning and facilitating events, and acting as liaisons between students and other lecturers.

The re-establishment of CESA was initially unclear. The pressure to create a reliable starting point that would foster student-centredness was overwhelming. Running the online organisation like a blog during the lockdown helped to provide support and promote students' development and well-being.

Forming CESA was challenging, due to a lack of structure, time constraints, limited recognition, and financial support. Mitigation strategies included aligning CESA's goals with the university's strategic objectives, highlighting the impact on students' development, sharing positive experiences to motivate the participation of other academics, and co-running the organisation to share administrative work.

Community engagement initiatives formed a significant part of CESA's activities, aiming to benefit both the local community and the students. Examples included stationery and sanitary towel drives, as well as student development workshops. The positive impact of these activities was evident in the donations received and the gratitude expressed by the community.

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Managing CESA provided personal growth opportunities, skills development, and leadership experiences. It allowed the chairperson to create a different learning environment for students, foster a sense of connection and belonging, and develop students into caring and compassionate future leaders.

Strengths in managing the organisation included experiential learning and the opportunity to work with a diverse student population. Weaknesses included challenges related to structure, time, recognition, and financial support, but these could be mitigated through careful planning, collaboration, and sharing responsibilities.

Overall, the chairperson experience was positive, and the commitment to positively impact students through CESA remained strong.

Reflecting on the lessons learned from the CESA experiences

Based on the reflections of the CESA chairpersons, regarding their personal development and lessons learned, various skills were required to manage CESA, such as leadership, time management, communication, organisational abilities, networking, problem-solving, and self-confidence. Acknowledging that student-centredness initiatives are not as recognised as research and teaching achievements in academia, the chairpersons plan to integrate CESA's activities with teaching and research outcomes to highlight the importance of student-centredness.

The reflective article considered the relationship between CESA's community engagement activities and student development. Community engagement provides students with opportunities to apply leadership and organisational skills in real-world contexts, fostering individuality, spirituality, and moral development. Overall, the article suggests that involvement in student clubs and organisations, such as CESA, correlates with positive student development outcomes, as referenced in literature findings. Studies by Astin and Sax (1998) and Foubert and Urbanski (2006) support the idea that participation in student organisations enhances students' cognitive and affective development. Positive peer interactions in student organisations contribute to interpersonal competence, cognitive complexity, and humanitarianism. The article emphasises the importance of involving first-year students in CESA to foster purpose development. Participation in student organisations is associated with psychosocial development in areas such as educational involvement, career planning, life management, and cultural participation. In conclusion, these combined benefits effectively cultivate a culture of student-centredness. Hence, the reflections support the argument of the article.

Proposed action plan for CESA's future improvement and growth

A seven-step action plan is proposed to ensure CESA's future improvement and growth (Table 4).

Table 4: CESA action plan

Phase	Description	Elaboration
1	Identifying current needs	A comprehensive needs assessment must be conducted with all CESA's members to identify CESA's current strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement. The data can be collected through surveys and interviews with the current members (Spillane et al., 1999). However, such data collection will require ethical clearance at faculty level. Hence, this first step will require a research proposal to present to the faculty's ethics committee.
2	Developing a strategic plan	Based on the results of the needs assessment, a strategic plan can be developed to indicate CESA's vision, mission, goals, and growth strategies. By using the results obtained from CESA's members, the plan will align with the members' aspirations and expectations (Dugan & Komives, 2010).
3	Enhancing leadership development	Aligning with the recommendations of Posner and Brodsky (1992), the existing skills development programs (LinkedIn profile development, CV creation, job interview preparation) can be enhanced and offered on a regular basis, as opposed to once a year. Additionally, leadership development programmes and training opportunities can be offered for members to enhance their leadership skills, including communication, teamwork, and problem-solving abilities. The CESA mentorship programme can also be expedited each year to encourage new students to join and encourage returning mentees to provide mentorship.
4	Improving member engagement	More CESA leadership roles can be created to offer diverse and meaningful opportunities for members to contribute. These roles can include committee involvement, project leadership, or event planning to create a sense of belonging and community among members (Kuh et al., 2010).
5	Enhancing transparent communication	Currently, all CESA communications are announced via CESA's module page on the learning management system. However, Haber (2011) recommend streamlined communication channels to ensure effective information sharing, transparency, and inclusivity. A WhatsApp group can be used for emergency communications, while a quarterly newsletter can be presented for more comprehensive feedback and updates to keep members informed about organisational activities and decisions.
6	Fostering collaboration	Supporting the recommendation of Magolda and Astin (1993), collaborative partnerships can be formed with other student organisations, academic departments, and community organisations to widen CESA's reach and impact. Such collaborative projects can provide diverse learning experiences and expand CESA's network.
7	Monitoring progress	The progress of the action plan outlined in step 2 must be regularly assessed to evaluate the effectiveness of implemented strategies. Additional feedback from members can be used to make informed adjustments and improvements to CESA's activities and initiatives.

Ethical considerations

No ethical clearance was required, as the data were sourced from the authors.

Potential conflict of interest

There were no conflicts of interest involved in authoring this article.

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REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

Diaries of establishing an entrepreneurship incubator at a health sciences university

Zviri kuitika mukugadzwa kwenzvimbo yekusimudzira bhizinesi payunivhesiti yehutano

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ABSTRACT

Entrepreneurship Development in Higher Education (EDHE) conferences and students' entrepreneurial intervarsity competitions have brought awareness and insight to students, academics, and other higher learning institution (HEI) stakeholders to the value that entrepreneurship can provide them and their communities. A reflective practice account on entrepreneurship development interventions at a South African health sciences university was conducted using a qualitative ethnography research method and living theory. This study reflects efforts in integrating entrepreneurship at a university that does not offer management and economic sciences. The method was to benchmark and emulate occurrences at universities leading in entrepreneurship and the use of qualitative inputs from the EDHE. Integration of entrepreneurship into the mainstream university core functions is grounded in futuristic curriculum theory which recognises the necessity of re-organising current needs to meet future global changes and trends, traverse existing circumstances, and the imagined future and challenges. The current South African environment is faced with high unemployment, especially of the youth. This has also necessitated HEI to review their graduate attributes and refocus students' mindsets towards entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship education can be demonstrated through business start-ups and incubation initiatives that might provide the missing gaps for growing an entrepreneurial university. This article presents views, challenges and experiences on the implementation of an entrepreneurship incubator at a health sciences university in South Africa.

KEYWORDS

Business, entrepreneurship, innovation, entrepreneurial university, unemployment

GWARO MUCHIDIMBU

Bazi rehurumende rinoona nefundo nezvemabasa emaoko nemabhizimusi rakabatana nemainisitichusheni edzidzo yepamusoro vari kubatsira vana vechikoro, vadzidzisi nevamwe pamayunivhesiti nevamwe wadau kuti vaone kukosha kwemabasa emaoko nemabhizimusi munharaunda dzavanogara uye munyika mavanogara. Tsvakurudzo yakaitwa mugwaro rino, pakashandiswa univhesiti iri kukurudzira vana vechikoro kuti vaite mabasa emaoko vachitanga

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mabhizimusi. Asi zvisinei, univhesiti iyi haina zvidzidzo zvinodzisa zvemabhizimusi zvinowanikwa mune mamwe maunivhesiti. Tsvakurudzo yegwaro rino inoratidza kuti kudzidzisa vana vari kuyunivhesiti zvidzidzo zvinozovabatsira kutanga mabhizimusi ndiwo uchava mugariro kupota pasi rese munguva inotevera. Gwaro rino rinotsanangura zvakare kuti nyika ye South Africa yakatarisana nekushayika kwamabasa saka zvinotoda kuti vechidiki vadzidziswe kupinda mune zvemabhizimusi nekuita mabasa emaoko kuti vawane kuzviraramisa. Nekudaro,vana vechikoro vanenge vachifanira kuti varatidzwe gwara rekutanga mabhizimusi zvikuru sei zvichibva mumainisitichusheni edzidzo yepamusoro. Asizve, gwaro rino richada kuratidza zvibingamupinyi nemaonero arikuitwa kudzidzisa zvemabhizimusi nemabasa emaoko payunivhesiti inodzidzisa zvekurapa huye zvinoenderana nehutano.

MAZWI EKURANGARIRA
Bhizimusi, yunivesiti inokuridzira zvidzidzo zvemabasa emaoko; zvidzidzo zvemabasa emaoko, utsanzi, kushaikwa kwemabasa

Introduction

The acquisition of a formal qualification, especially from a university, used to afford graduates guaranteed access to employment. Of late, however, finding employment for South African university graduates has become a daunting task. Attaining academic qualifications in modern-day South Africa does not guarantee degree holders immediate employment in the job sector. The unemployment rate currently sits at about 32.9% (Statistics South Africa, 2023), which is viewed by some as an undercount. Initiatives are needed to enhance capacity among university academics and students to create jobs and self-employment. Entrepreneurship Development in Higher Education (EDHE) is a platform initiated by the South African Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) that organises entrepreneurial conferences, workshops, discussions, exposures, and meetings, and holds entrepreneurial intervarsity competitions for students. They have fostered an awareness of the value entrepreneurship can add to HEIs.

This article on the establishment of an entrepreneurship centre at a health sciences university (HSU) in South Africa takes the reader through a recent process of establishing such a centre, from its initiation, the role of EDHE, the role of stakeholders within HEIs and the challenges that were encountered.

Initiating the health science university into entrepreneurship

University students have become increasingly vocal about their concerns regarding limited employability after completing their qualifications. This particularly applies to students who do not follow programmes at the HSU that conclude with professional qualifications in medicine, nursing, pharmacy and oral health. Students with these professional qualifications are deployed to hospitals even before leaving the university. As many science students in non-professional degree programmes struggle to get employed, they may become demoralised in their pursuit of science qualifications.

In order to respond to students' concerns, the HEI had to search for ways to address such problems. Fortunately, in 2018 EDHE commenced with a conference to chart the way forward on entrepreneurship in higher education. This is how it all began. Academics have since then been on this journey to develop and nurture an entrepreneurial health sciences university. By and large, universities need to evolve from teaching and learning, research and engagement to being drivers of innovation and entrepreneurship (Clarke

& Cornelissen, 2011; Hackman & Johnson, 2009; Zahra, 2009) as the fourth university mission.

The role of EDHE in entrepreneurship

The DHET introduced the EDHE programme to promote a culture of entrepreneurship at South African universities. The EDHE programme is coordinated by Universities South Africa (USAf), which is an umbrella body of South Africa's 26 public universities. The EDHE aims to respond to the issues of graduate unemployment as well as the need for universities to become more entrepreneurial. EDHE's role and focus is to advance entrepreneurship development and support entrepreneurial activities across universities thus equipping students, academics, other staff members with skills and abilities to participate in the economy as well as the provision of support to teaching, research, innovation, and the commercialisation of businesses, intellectual property (IP) and patents.

The entrepreneurial university

In higher learning, entrepreneurial universities (EntrU) provide knowledge that is up to date and research-driven, and their graduates do not struggle to find jobs or careers (Clark, 2004). An EntrU produces graduates who are job creators, and who are sought after by employers. Many of the universities in South Africa are not (yet) entrepreneurial (Ncanywa, 2019).

An EntrU is a HEI that contributes to the development of the wider entrepreneurial and innovative environment, on a regional, national, and international level (Azeez & Aliu, 2023). A university can only be entrepreneurial if it has a business incubator for students, academics and community entrepreneurs (O'Gorman et al., 2008) According to Delic et al. (2012), in a centre for entrepreneurship, there needs to be a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship. The centre should be able to sell their expertise, such as consultation services for entrepreneurship, to enable other businesses to thrive. Delic et al. (2012) highlight the merit of an entrepreneurial environment, which is a conducive setting for entrepreneurial activities such as a centre for incubating small businesses. The centre should establish networking relationships with both the public and government sectors. The staff of the centre should be hands-on and base their innovation on research and experimentation. The centre for entrepreneurship should be a supportive ecosystem for start-ups and entrepreneurs on and off campus and should commit to social impact and sustainability. More so, an EntrU is defined as a university that has the capacity to innovate, recognise and create opportunities, work as a team, take risks, and respond to challenges. An EntrU is based on the commercialisation of personalised education courses, consultancy services, and extension activities, as well as on commoditisation of patents or start-ups. Other initiatives of an EntrU could come through supporting local small businesses through community engagement programmes. An EntrU involves the creation of new enterprises by university professors, technicians, and students.

The six (6) key elements of an EntrU are:

1. A culture of innovation and entrepreneurship.
2. A focus on commercialisation and technology transfer.
3. Strong partnerships with industry and government.
4. An emphasis on experiential learning and hands-on training.
5. A supportive ecosystem for start-ups and entrepreneurs.
6. A commitment to social impact and sustainability.

A health entrepreneurial ecosystem

The ecosystem entrepreneurial programme is proposed in line with the DHET's EDHE programme. This programme is designed to serve as an effective vehicle for the HEI to implement the EDHE programme. The aim of the entrepreneurship programme is to create a collaborative platform between different stakeholders in the university such as management, staff and students to harness universities as spaces of innovation, collaboration and entrepreneurship.

The role of an HEI's entrepreneurship programme unit is to support the implementation of the activities of the programme (Delic et al., 2012). This includes promotion of business start-ups and building and maintaining of sustainable businesses by providing access to extra-curricular activities, workshops, experiential learning opportunities, entrepreneurship research, entrepreneur mentorship programmes and a supportive start-up ecosystem for students, staff, and communities surrounding the institution. The envisaged activities for the ecosystem are: student entrepreneurship, specialised programmes, enterprise development for the external business community, and communities of practice, among others. For example, the hosting of student entrepreneurship week events which showcase the achievements of student entrepreneurs.

Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship refers to the creation and extraction of value using creative and innovative ideas by following a change that entails risk beyond what is normally encountered in starting an enterprise, which may include values other than the simply economic (Yetisen et al., 2015). Being entrepreneurial can refer to being business-minded, innovative, tactical, not being scared to take risks, or being capable of fostering ground-breaking outcomes. An entrepreneurial enterprise operates beyond the norm to do things differently from similar enterprises to deliver outcomes that are not easily matched (Klein & Pereira, 2020). Such an enterprise would have a culture of innovation, and focus its resources on innovation.

Entrepreneurship is the creation of economic value mainly by spotting an opportunity, creating a change, commonly involving taking risk by starting a business (Gaddefors & Anderson, 2017). It can be viewed as the activity of establishing a business or businesses, taking mainly financial risks hoping to make profit. Yetisen et al. (2015) consider entrepreneurship as the innovative process of developing, consolidating, and managing a new business to generate profit while taking on financial risk. According to

Wilden et al. (2018), the concept of entrepreneurship revolves around five key concepts of (1) business creation, (2) innovation, (3) new value creation, (4) opportunity, and (5) uncertainty. All these demonstrate how entrepreneurship is defined differently, but common key items are innovation, value creation, the profit-making objective, and the process happens under uncertain conditions. The pioneer in entrepreneurship is the entrepreneur, an individual creating or investing in a business, who bears the most risk and enjoys the most reward from their investment (Backes-Gellner & Moog, 2013). Due to innovation being inherent in entrepreneurship, and being the main source of business, goods, new ideas, procedures, and services, Backes-Gellner and Moog (2013) regard the entrepreneur as an innovator.

Being entrepreneurial

The main prerequisite to being an entrepreneur is being business-minded. This means having extensive knowledge of the industry and having the ability to exploit that knowledge to create new opportunities (Shane & Nicolaou, 2013). An entrepreneurial person shares ideas freely and celebrates failure as an opportunity for learning and growth (Hisrich, 2011). An entrepreneur is not easily intimidated when sharing the ideas. They communicate knowing that they can always improve performance and introduce new ideas when copied, and this is why they communicate freely and with authority (Euler et al., 2011). Maintaining this attitude requires creativity, courage and wisdom. However, Euler et al. (2011) counsel that in order to be successful, and remain successful during progressively turbulent times, SMEs and entrepreneurs should obtain certain success factors. On the other hand, Shane (2008) points out that practical introduction of new ideas under financial and time resource constraints may remain an illusion.

Graduate attributes in entrepreneurial students

The emergence of graduate attributes has been ascribed to the marketability of graduates of higher education. These attributes include abilities for job creation and self-employment, which will be imparted during entrepreneurship week and conference, among others. Due to increasing demand from employers and the knowledge economy for highly skilled labour, governments and higher education policies around the world have entrusted universities with the mission of providing an employable graduate workforce (Hill et al., 2016). Graduate attributes are referred to as the qualities, skills and understandings that a university community agrees would be desirable for its students to develop during their time at the institution (Bowden et al., 2000), which are linked to employability (Jorre de St Jorre & Oliver, 2018). Graduate attributes indicate the range of skills and qualities that they should develop by graduation, regardless of their degree discipline (Barrie, 2004), which will help them to stand out, especially from non-graduates. These graduate-level skills are marketed by universities as desirable by employers and will strengthen students' employment positions (Green et al., 2009).

In the field of entrepreneurship, graduate attributes should go beyond preparing students to launch their own businesses and instead upskill them with the fundamental abilities required to thrive in the dynamic job market (Olumuyiwa et al., 2023). Graduates

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from EntrUs do not experience pressure to search for jobs. They can create their own companies and give themselves jobs, and then extend job opportunities to other people. Such universities should, on a daily basis, assist in the repositioning of struggling businesses, positioning emerging ones, assisting start-ups, and have a dedicated centre for undertaking such operations, be resourced with equipment for business consulting, and be resourced with people who can effectively undertake activities of a business-related nature. A dedicated office could be created to coordinate entrepreneurial activities run through different divisions such as student affairs, research and teaching and learning among others.

However, many universities in Africa, South Africa included, offer entrepreneurship educational programmes that are not sufficiently evaluated in terms of efficacy and effectiveness (Ikuemonisan et al., 2022). Morselli (2018) explains that entrepreneurship education in any institution of learning should be evaluated on a regular basis to determine how well it enables students to develop competencies such as work-ready skills, innovative attitudes, and knowledge applicable to the diverse vocations for the advancement of individual social and economic well-being. Scott and Ivala (2019) submit that graduates from HEIs should be exposed to experiential learning in order to enable them to make significant contributions to nation-building. With this in mind, the essence of higher education is to develop human capital, which could then translate to societal development. In addition, Sansone et al. (2021) posit that the global economy requires graduates that are equipped with a range of transversal skills and entrepreneurial competencies that will enable them to succeed in practically any productive enterprise. Entrepreneurial competencies, according to Canton (2021), include the capacity to think constructively, solve problems creatively and communicate effectively, among others. Consequently, graduates require both academic credentials and a range of fundamental skills to succeed in the job market. Hence, the overarching challenge herein is for universities to identify the drivers of entrepreneurial skills acquisition amongst university students. This will offer insights for policies aimed at improving levels of entrepreneurship in academic settings, especially in South African university contexts.

Theoretical framework

This section discusses the theoretical frameworks used in the study: living theory and futuristic curriculum theory.

Living theory

Whitehead and McNiff (2006) define living theory as the creation of new knowledge that leads to enhanced professional practice. The living theory was introduced in relation to action research, with the contribution intended for educational knowledge. Living theory encompasses the idea that each person can create their own living theory in the descriptions and explanations that they may offer in order to manage their professional practice. Living theory in this article refers to entrepreneurial experiences of the leaders at EntrUs. In an effort to make living theory effective in improving professional lives, Hawkins and Hollinworth (2004) explain that new knowledge emerges as a result of six

interlinked stages. The stages are: (1) reflection on and evaluation of known knowledge; (2) integration of newly taught and relevant knowledge; (3) self-exploration; (4) new knowledge emerging from self-exploration; (5) reflecting on the implications of the other stages for personal and professional practice; and (6) their application to new professional experiences. The emergence of new knowledge, and acknowledgement of its impact on the practitioner enhances improvement of professional practice.

Value of living theory and its usefulness for EntrU

Keedy (2005) avers that the main research objective is to produce theory; the eventual purpose of which is to make professional practice more efficient. Theory is learnt for improving practice and connects meaningful activity in research with daily life by positioning values to practice. In fact, a theory that cannot help to improve people's life circumstances is worthless. With living theory, each practitioner approaches practice differently, especially after learning the basics of the trade. In this theory, practical explanations are particularly influential, as they form an essential part of striving to improve the quality of professional practice. Practice involves the practitioner's reflection on and evaluation of actions in their effort to bring about enhancement by working to reduce the gap between their values and their practice. This process leads to the emergence of new knowledge, which may be sustained over time because it was informed by practice. The cycle is established by which sustainability of knowledge leads to enhancing and improvement of the individual's professional practice.

A longer research process to accomplish a worthy result may be necessary, and often outweighs obtaining hurried or *ad hoc* results that lack the necessary value to humans and in their lives. For instance, this study may have taken longer than we initially intended, but the situation predicted it to be necessary. We obtained experiences from EDHE workshops and guidance to a point where we could deliver when given a responsibility. So far we have mobilised participation of students and staff into entrepreneurship activities. One highlight is that there are small companies running on campus and outside campus that are registered with CIPC (the Companies Intellectual Property Commission, previously CIPRO) and paying taxes. We also had internal campus entrepreneurship workshops. Learning should be relevant/useful to the local situation. In the process, we learned that living theory accepts that global practices and achievements should be viewed and understood in order for the local environment to benefit through our contextualisation of the important results. Focus of the contribution is given to the local environment.

Evidence of our development

This study gathered research data to explain the state of affairs at our institution. In line with Whitehead and McNiff (2006), initial data consist of the personal experiences that can be described to show why researchers are concerned about engaging in a particular field of study. Delong (2002) informs that living theory action research requires continuous monitoring of performance, data gathering and generating evidence. Monitoring entails continually observing the processes planned in order to minimise or

eliminate deviations and wastages. This helped us in deciding on the kind of information we needed to gather to show the limitations/concerns about EntrUs and HSU's potential through the EntrU route. The data collected contained relevant information on funding, such as Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA) funds, and on the useful ways to create and manage a business incubator. The lessons learnt from the data assisted during funding applications, stimulated and encouraged HSU to establish a business incubator despite lacking a business faculty. The funds were secured, and the centre was erected. The process leads to policy formulation, and a move towards operating the centre.

An important finding is that despite the case university lacking a business faculty, there are already expertise and skills within the university that could enable entrepreneurship development and entrepreneurship. In addition, students were vocal about the HSU requiring an entrepreneurial drive, especially in the science and technology field that offers non-professional study programmes. This finding inspired a funding application, which was a joint effort between staff and students, and the intention to establish an incubation centre.

Futuristic curriculum theory

The concept of a futuristic curriculum (FC) fits in the development of an EntrU and leads to attainment of the requisite graduate attributes envisaged for an EntrU. FC development should lead to the main functions of university education in the development of an entrepreneurial graduate. FC trains students to face challenges and problems in the now and of the future such as the problems of unemployment (Yusuf, 2023; Fensham, 2016; Siraj & Ali, 2008; Wang, 2019). This calls for the integration of entrepreneurship into the mainstream university curriculum (Siraj & Mei, 2015). The justification behind FC is reorganising current curricula to meet futuristic global changes such as incorporation of entrepreneurship in a health sciences university, the fourth industrial revolution (4IR) and the digital age, among others, in order to traverse existing requirement, and the imagined future. FC development enables academia to adopt transforming ideas from research and the world of work. The future outcomes not yet prevailing require curriculum expert projections and other stakeholders, such as industry collaboration among them, to provide guidance on future models (Mei & Siraj, 2019). Furthermore, the emphasis is on the need for the curriculum to be grounded on emergent trends.

Thus, the FC is future-orientated and at the same time servicing current requirements. It, therefore, enables the production of graduates who can do well in the current circumstances and graduate skills which will still be relevant in the future. FC entails an instructional strategy that relocates learning activities, including the ones that may have customarily been regarded as homework and industrial work, into the classroom. Apart from this, FC has immense benefits guided by a mentor through a learner-centred model in which class time investigates topics in more depth and generates meaningful learning opportunities and experiences. Moreover, FC increases student engagement, stimulating positive learning attitudes, confidence and provides for a kind of blended learning (BL) approach (Drake & Burns, 2004; Yujing, 2015; Hungwe & Dagada, 2013;

Osguthorpe & Graham, 2003; Singh, 2003). BL involves the considerate mingling and integration of classroom face-to-face and online learning experiences. Thus, it provides a balance of in-class and out-of-class pursuits. FC and BL become effective enhancers of modern learning without which a competitive curriculum cannot survive.

Methodology

The study followed an ethnographic methodology, which is the scientific description of people, their cultures, customs, habits, and mutual differences (Moschella, 2023). The respondents were student entrepreneurs and their academic guidance team from faculty. The cultures under study were the way they conducted their entrepreneurship practices. As for the entrepreneurship habits, these referred to their routines as entrepreneurs. As we could not visit the EntrUs, we took notes on the core issues of EntrUs each time we attended the EDHE conferences and sessions presented by representatives of these universities. In total we attend six conferences, one per year, with each conference lasting up to five days. There were also six student sessions.

Ethnography, through living theory, assisted in the collection of data through observing what other EntrUs presented at the conferences. We then went on to experiment with knowledge that we gathered. The delegation from HSU engaged with those from the universities of Cape Town and the Witwatersrand (hereinafter UCT and Wits, respectively), who were the leading EntrUs. Their incubation centres were visited, and discussions were held directly seeking advice on becoming an entrepreneurial university. The delegates from UCT made presentations regularly, sharing their experiences and ideas. These inputs constituted parts of the text data, which were analysed using thematic content analysis as this reflective practice account is qualitative in nature.

Experimental ethnography is a mode of fieldwork, in which social researchers venture into the collaborative production of venues for knowledge creation that turn the field into a site for the production of anthropological knowledge (Berglund & Criado, 2018). In this study, fieldwork was conducted through taking notes during encounters in EDHE and with EntrU staff attending the conferences.

Entrepreneurship became the answer to resolving unemployment challenges faced by our students especially in the School of Science and Technology (SST). The observations provided us with the knowledge, skills and tools to introduce entrepreneurship on campus. The entrepreneurship team of our HEI who attended EDHE activities took notes on examples given of what the leading South African EntrUs did to reach their standing. The team also collected more notes when they interacted with representatives from SEDA in the Department of Small Business Development (DSBD). From these experiences, we applied for funding to establish our own entrepreneurship incubator.

The dean of the SST supported the entrepreneurship team with funds and time to attend EDHE conference sessions. After each conference session, the team updated the dean of the school on what EDHE sentiments were, and on the possibilities of establishing an entrepreneurial centre. Part of the methodology in 2018 saw the entrepreneurship

team of our HEI apply to SEDA for funding that would assist in establishing an incubation centre on campus.

Results

This section presents the results of the study encompassing funding, creation of an incubation centre, staffing of the centre, progress made to date, planned operations and critical reflection.

Funding

The application to SEDA for funding was successful, and a total of ZAR 3 million was allocated for the project. There were conditions accompanying the fund, which the HEI first had to meet before the agreement to release the funds could be made. The process for the project to start an incubation centre was then initiated. At the initial stage of ensuring fulfilment of the conditions, especially of the structures and team member composition of the project, our HEI experienced internal challenges and disputes as research and teaching each wanted sole ownership of the project. On the other hand, the entrepreneurship team viewed the project as suitable for mutual ownership as both teaching and research would benefit. However, the hurdle was finally overcome, and the project set in motion. This being done allowed the entrepreneurship team to begin looking for space on campus that would fit the stipulated conditions of the incubator.

Creation of the entrepreneurship incubation centre

After establishing the internal project structure and approval by SEDA that the conditions were met, the site for the centre was identified. SEDA was then invited to campus to assess whether the site would suit its conditions, and to advise on the way forward based on their experiences from the EntrUs they had been working with. These were incorporated as further inputs. The diary of the centre is illustrated below with only the major deliverables shown.

The incubation centre was established to accelerate the pace of HSU's qualification as an EntrU. The HSU is dominated by the health sciences, with only a meagre offering of science and technology; and no business, economic or management sciences. The centre was intended to function as a faculty related to the business sciences would. Applications were made to SEDA for funds, and they were granted. Data were analysed thematically by selecting from the experiences provided for creating a business incubation centre and benchmarking these against the experiences of EntrUs. Incubation creation on the HSU campus is at an advanced stage, however, operations have started at a slow pace due to a lack of policies and guidelines, as only the EDHE programmes and mandates are being attended to or addressed. There is already buy-in from HSU management, and the board of governance is being constituted.

Stage 1: Site identification in 2019

The site photographed in figures 1 and 2 below was identified in 2019. It was an abandoned building that was used by the veterinary science faculty to train with or keep animals many years ago.


Figures 1 and 2: Building condition before renovation

As shown, we initially found it with only the building and halls, no partitions or offices. Outside, the building was overgrown with weeds, and the road leading to it was also not suitable for vehicles. There was absolutely nothing about it in this form that suited SEDA specifications. The building would require major refurbishment to satisfy these specifications.

Stage 2: Site progress in 2020 to 2022

The building was not secure enough to meet SEDA requirements. Water and sanitation infrastructure were also not in the desired state. Lights were not fully compliant or were unfinished. During this time our HEI had adapted and placed people in charge of the development of the centre as required by SEDA. There was no activity in 2020 due to COVID-19 lockdown. Nothing much happened in 2022 as well, because of a move from SST to a different division whose members had to start by familiarising themselves with what was required.

Figures 3, 4 and 5: Incubation centre

Stage 3: Site progress in 2023

This is how the incubation centre appears, outside and inside (see figures 3, 4 and 5). Outside there will be poster boards for marketing and showcasing the centre's offerings. The centre also plans further advertising with billboards on the main road for the attention of commuters driving between town and township. Inside are offices for the key role players and a large working space for admission of clients and students, and space to demonstrate and train the would-be entrepreneurs.

Staffing of the centre

Staffing the centre is in progress, with the appointment of some key personnel, including the acting centre manager, being completed. The acting manager is tasked with the operationalisation of the centre in line with the university strategic objectives. This, however, has added additional work and responsibilities, as the appointed person still has to fulfil their academic responsibility of teaching and learning, community engagement and research. On the complementary office to the entrepreneurship incubator, an acting manager for the technology transfer office (TTO) was also appointed. The TTO acting manager oversees the strategic objective of increasing commercialisation and together with the entrepreneurship acting manager, they will complement each other in realizing the university's aim of translating research and innovation to driving

economic and social impact. The stages that are still outstanding in personnel placement and appointments is the formalisation of the two positions into permanent university positions and the appointment of complementary staff in the entrepreneurship spaces, such as administrators, business development officers, among others.

Progress so far

Achieved milestones include completion of the Centre for Entrepreneurship Rapid Incubator (CfERI), the establishment of the TTO, and the appointment of acting managers for the two units. However, some outstanding items for the full creation of the centre are coming up with new business and operational plans, policies and procedures for the operationalisation of the CfERI and appointment of complementary staff. Oversight visits from SEDA and DSBD have been conducted. These representatives who were conducting oversight visits have been impressed with the achievements of the health sciences university so far on the CfERI. SEDA, as the centre's initial main funder, plays a mentoring and monitoring role. The centre officially began operating in September 2023.

Planned modes of operating the centre

Key personnel will be able to undertake the key functions of the units by creating awareness on entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial workspaces and its ecosystems, assist on an *ad hoc* basis to develop enterprises and to organise and run EDHE activities on campus. Our HEI does not have a faculty for economic sciences, hence theoretical expertise on the aspects of business and management will be outsourced. The planned mode to do this is through solicitation of expertise from neighbouring HEIs with similar objectives on the development of entrepreneurs and the entrepreneurial university.

Critical reflective analysis

A policy draft was developed in line with SEDA governance guidelines. The policy took about five years due to internal disagreements on the placement of the entrepreneurship ecosystem in the university's organogram. Strategic implementation of key performance areas are only emerging in the 2024 to 2028 university strategic plan. The late delivery of the policy and implementation strategy had a negative impact on entrepreneurship progress on campus. Integration of entrepreneurship into the curriculum did not take place in this time. During the delays, the sponsor threatened to recall the initial seed funding.

However, from 2024, the integration of entrepreneurship into academic departments will be a requirement and departments have therefore developed internal operational policies for entrepreneurship. This might move the university towards the achievement of entrepreneurial activities.

The information found to be most useful from EDHE conferences and interactions with EntrUs related to funds, policies and operations as well as valuable skills and knowledge pertaining to commercialisation of start-up ideas and that are worthy to operate a business incubator. Currently, the incubation centre in HSU has been established to accelerate the pace of HSU's qualification as an EntrU. The centre is

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playing a key role in closing the gap that could have been filled by a faculty related to economic and business sciences.

Discussion

There has been remarkable progress and major achievements in the development of the CfERI, despite the challenges faced. The major aspects have been completed. The journeys, toils of academics with the limited resources at their disposal has seen the light of day. This endurance for the purpose of making a difference and an impact in society can be replicated in other institutions with minor modifications. That said, the major challenges of funding and budgetary allocations from HEIs is a major concern and slows the pace of achieving the required strategic objectives of HEIs, EDHE and DHET at large. The other challenges faced related to the issues of governance and situating the CfERI within the university structure. These power struggles contributed to project delays. A clear mandate at the onset of the establishment of such centres and allocation of budgetary support would have gone a long way in resolving such unpleasant instances.

SEDA provided the guidelines and plans for the centre and staffing. This assisted in the conversion of the allocated building for the centre to SEDA specifications. Compared to other universities, it was difficult to emulate the placement of the centre in economic and management sciences as our HEI is limited to health and sciences. Hence, we sourced help from universities that were exemplary EntrUs.

Conclusion

EDHE conferences have brought awareness to students, academics, universities and other stakeholders that mindsets and practices, curriculum and communities should be transformed in the direction of entrepreneurship. There are possibilities and opportunities in the higher education landscape for bringing incubation and start-up centres to fruition. Well-defined strategic objectives, governance structures and budgetary outlays are required at the onset. Setting up an incubation hub which has made an impact on entrepreneurial universities and university communities has been a fruitful achievement and experience.

The team from HSU engaged with those from other universities such as UCT and Wits which had well established entrepreneurial ecosystems. Visits to some university incubators were conducted, and discussions were held directly seeking advice. A lot of information and ideas were also shared through presentations by the visited universities.

For those interested in realizing a similar project, we recommend that they look at policies, standard operation procedures for establishment and operationalisation of centres for entrepreneurship rapid incubators. There is also a need to create awareness of funding models and various funding entities available to undertake such tasks. More research needs to be done, more stories told, and diaries shared on growing entrepreneurial universities.

Ethics statement

This article contains no content that is libelous or infringing the copyright of other parties.

Potential conflict of interest

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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CAMPUS REPORT

Higher Education Leadership and Management (HELM) – Advancing and supporting leadership development in South African higher education through scholarship

Oliver Seale[1] & Birgit Schreiber[2]

Universities South Africa (USAf) has two flagship programmes which both focus on advancing student success in the South African higher education sector: Entrepreneurial Development in Higher Education (EDHE) and Higher Education Leadership and Management (HELM). HELM was launched in 2002. From 2018 the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) has supported HELM in its repositioning and revitalisation to advance governance, leadership, and management in South Africa's universities.

The HELM programme and student affairs

The USAf's creation and implementation of the Leadership and Management Strategy Group in 2023 signals USAf's ongoing investment and support for good governance and effective leadership and management development at all levels in our universities. In terms of giving effect to its core mandate, HELM programmes and initiatives have been designed to assist individuals and institutions to identify their capacitation needs within their specific contexts and align individual leadership development pathways with their organisational objectives. HELM's implementation plan and activities are directed towards the key challenges and contextual realities faced by individuals and our universities and are geared towards addressing them more effectively. To this end HELM has created two portfolios internally, one on governance, leadership, and management and the other on student success.

Notions and debates around student success have developed beyond student throughput rates and involve a holistic understanding of the student life cycle. This starts from enrolment to graduation, including how we provide relevant services, shape the living and learning context, and how we engage students in the transformation of their tertiary experience. Student affairs, student support and development are critical and vital contributors towards student and institutional success. Across the world, staff in this domain of higher education are supported and capacitated via professionalization and bespoke development programmes, which advance their contributions towards institutional objectives for success.

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SASS capacitation programme

Based on a sector-wide training needs analysis and stakeholder meetings in 2021 to 2022, under the auspices of its student success portfolio, HELM designed and implemented the Student Affairs and Student Success (SASS) programme. This is a direct response to capacitation requirements identified by professionals working in student affairs, student development and student support services across 26 public institutions. The survey drew respondents from across student affairs, student support, student services, transformation and equity, health and wellness, residences, communications and marketing, registrars and administration and other related areas. The survey found that 86% of the responding professionals (N=362) were keen to participate in a capacity building intervention to enhance their impact on student success. In terms of areas of capacitation needs, respondents to the survey overwhelmingly prioritised the following: (i) understanding, applying, and accelerating transformation, diversity, and equity; (ii) understanding how universities plan strategically and operationally; (iii) general leadership and management and (iv) understanding student support theory and practice.

Based on the training needs analysis and in collaboration with relevant stakeholders in the sector, like the South African Association of Senior Student Affairs Professionals (SAASSAP), HELM designed a capacity building programme that launched in May 2023. Through the SASS programme, HELM aims to respond to calls for the professionalization of student support.

The pilot SASS programme, with 50 participants from 24 universities, promotes and gives effect to HELM's overall mandate of promoting student success, institutional leadership, transformation, and social justice in South African higher education. Following a request for nominations to all 26 South African public universities, HELM received a significant number of excellent applications, and selected the best suited, mostly middle, and senior managers in the non-academic divisions of these institutions. Comprising of ten thematic learning units, SASS concludes its pilot on 28 November 2023 with a colloquium that marks its successful conclusion by showcasing the research projects of all the participants.

The HELM special issue of JSAA

Research and scholarship form the foundation of capacitation development and context-specific programme and project delivery for both USAf and HELM. Advancing and embedding research and scholarship is core to the development and delivery of HELM's mandate, objectives, and activities. The special guest edited issue of the *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa* (JSAA) is an outcome of discussions between USAf and HELM on a dedicated scholarly publication following its national conferences and summits, with a specific focus on this important area in South African higher education. Through multiple interactions between the HELM team and the editors of JSAA in the course of 2022, JSAA was requested to dedicate a special guest-edited issue to scholarship on student-centredness, student engagement, and the roles the university and the higher education

sector play in terms of student success. The JSAA Executive approved the request for a guest-edited issue of JSAA in collaboration with USAf/HELM in 2023.

The notions of engagement and student-centredness and how they intersect with the leadership and management of universities is how HELM is addressing this important conversation on student affairs in South African universities. The JSAA guest edited issue will advance and respond to the UCDP DHET target for HELM on research and scholarship in 2023. It will also provide a valuable theoretical and praxis online resource for the 50 SASS participants who will be completing the HELM SASS programme this year.

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Book Review

Global perspectives on student affairs and services: A handbook by B. Schreiber, R. B. Ludeman, C. R. Glass & G. Blanco (2023). Boston, US: Center for International Higher Education

Reviewed by Chris R. Glass[1]

Global Perspectives on Student Affairs and Services: A Handbook (Schreiber et al., 2023) offers a timely overview of the state of student affairs and services (SAS) in higher education institutions worldwide. This handbook builds on the expansive 2020 publication, *Student Affairs and Services in Higher Education: Global Foundations, Issues, and Best Practices* (Ludeman & Schreiber, 2020). It aims to elucidate the global foundations, issues, and best practices shaping SAS. Succinct yet insightful, the handbook illuminates the diversity of SAS models adapted across regions while underscoring values across contexts. The handbook profiles African examples like foundation programmes in South Africa that widen access to higher education and support underprepared students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The book also surfaces issues around broadening participation, addressing student diversity, and aligning with national development priorities across the African continent.

A major strength of the book is providing a broad orientation to the extensive SAS landscape. The opening section on the foundations of SAS concisely conveys multifaceted factors shaping structures, from theoretical frameworks to policy contexts. Key debates around professionalization, student activism, and access and equity are insightfully summarized. For instance, the book outlines how national policies and priorities inform SAS models, such as Germany's state-funded social welfare services for students. The extensive compendium of SAS functional areas vividly illustrates the range of services delivered worldwide. While condensed, this survey orientates readers to roles and objectives using apt examples like the United Kingdom's multifaith chaplaincy services. The concluding section helpfully identifies salient opportunities and challenges for progressing SAS globally, such as remote service delivery and alignment with the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

The profiles of functional units are condensed, providing basic descriptions and some chapters include examples of services manifest in different contexts. Similarly, while the book references various student development theories and models underpinning SAS, elaborating on how predominant theories inform SAS philosophy and practice across regions would enrich readers' understanding. Nonetheless, the handbook's wide geographic lens is valuable for highlighting commonalities and variances in how SAS is conceptualised and delivered worldwide.

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Practitioners can draw insights from the diverse examples and functional orientations shared. The book is a helpful starter resource for gaining broad exposure to SAS; specific models can then be further researched. It compellingly positions SAS as critical in advancing institutional and national goals, including social justice, and provides ideas for alignment. This book offers readers an understanding of the global landscape of SAS and its opportunities while emphasising that strong SAS frameworks are adaptable to local particularities. The handbook represents an important reference for the fast-developing field of global student affairs and services.

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Book Review

Student peer support initiatives in higher education: A collection of South African case studies by X. Cupido, N. Frade, T. Govender, E. Samkange & S. Pather (Eds.) (2022). Stellenbosch, SA: African Sun Media

Reviewed by Kasturi Behari-Leak[1]

University students find themselves in innovative yet stressful times in higher education. Numerous financial, social and emotional stressors affect their mental health which in turn affects their ability to cope with their studies. While lecturers, teaching staff and management can attempt to understand and empathise, we can never really know what it means to be a student in the current higher education context, especially in South Africa where issues of equity and parity are far from being realized in the university classroom. Given our context, is it possible that alongside academic and professional staff, students themselves can learn to support each other and work in ways that promote their success?

This is the central thesis of the book, *Student Peer Support Initiatives in Higher Education: A Collection of South African Case Studies,* which advocates for contextualised, holistic and engaged student learning. Globally, similar arguments are being made by advocates for student-centred learning. One example is the 'students as partners' movement (Healy et al., 2014), an important intervention for partnership among students, academics, professional services staff, senior managers and students' representative councils. The main goal is to alleviate some of the stressors that emerge through the curriculum. By creating a learning process underpinned by co-creation and co-design, students learn how to work in a supported environment while lecturers learn how to create a student-centred learning environment that is beneficial to all. Another global example is the promotion of relationship-rich education (Felten & Lambert, 2020) which drives student success through human connections and relationships which are key to students' thriving and succeeding in higher education. According to these authors, research shows that students learn best in an environment characterised by high expectation and high support and that students have immense ability to influence the learning environment of their peers.

Closer to home, in the African context, we acknowledge that many students are first-generation students or first in the family to attend university. As such, these students do not have context-relevant cultural or material resources to access during their studies. They face many barriers as a result of parents' university non-attendance, financial support, location of institutions in urban or rural contexts, access to data, technology

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and so on. Many students belong to single-parent households or are orphans, who play the role of parents to their siblings and others in their care. For many students, the university experience is far removed from the home, not least because universities have done little to bridge the gap between primary and secondary sites of learning, discourses, knowledge and sense of being. It is issues of alienation, marginalisation and visibility such as these that the decolonisation of higher education movement, nationally and globally, seeks to address by redressing the dominance of Western paradigms and worldviews in our curricula.

Given our context, this brilliant book, organised in three key parts, allows us to hear firsthand from academic developers about how they enable conditions for meaningful peer-to-peer support. Drawing on a collection of ten South African case studies across higher education institutions, authors provide rich examples of contextualised peer support programmes. Each case study highlights the importance of design, implementation and evaluation of existing programmes.

Underpinned by strong theoretical frameworks in the field of student learning, the first part of the book focuses on student support initiatives that provide readers with useful knowledge to explore and promote possibilities in their own contexts. This reader-friendly canvas of theoretical tools, which are accessible and engaging, segues into a philosophical and conceptual discussion of ubuntu and an ethics of care as relevant frames to enact a values-based approach to peer support programmes. Peer-to-peer academic support explored in one case study through the creative use of the notion of *Ubuntugogy,* a humanity-in-a-collective paradigm to re-think peer learning and support, is noteworthy. Across the collection of cases, the book demonstrates that the "system of giving and receiving help" , founded on the principles of respect, shared responsibility and mutual agreement, is key to pedagogical relationships in the classroom. "I am because we are" finds deep resonance in this book to promote peer-to-peer empathy and support.

As a unique contribution to existing knowledge in this field, the authors provide a well conceptualised framework and heuristic for student peer support roles in higher education. As the book suggests, no one model of peer support can be the panacea. A holistic approach is advocated in promoting an understanding of peer support as a spectrum of interventions relative to context and students. First year university students who struggle to transition into higher education need academic and social support to find their place and sense of belonging. Who better to help them with this transition than their peers, who have walked the path, mediated the challenges and now understand best what to do to maximise the student experience. Peers also know how to work towards the attributes they need to demonstrate as graduates when they enter the world of work. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted for us all that resilience is a key graduate attribute that all students need to foster.

While theories inform the different types of peer support namely tutoring, mentoring, supplemental instruction and peer assisted learning, the reflections, data, voices of students, academic developers and university teachers are heard through each case. As one case study asserts through its 'we dare to care' programme, we see

how peer supported learning emanates from care. This book provides examples of high impact practices to integrate student success interventions at each step of the student journey. The book exemplifies how contextualised academic development programmes if attuned to student needs, can make a huge difference in the life cycle of students, from application to graduation. The different approaches provide a rich tapestry for those embarking on peer supported learning in their own universities and show a nuanced application of theories that speak to the needs of students at different universities in challenging contexts. The underpinning philosophical values demonstrate a commitment to transformation and advancement of students as a collective.

All the case studies in the book are a significant contribution to the field of contextualised peer-supported learning. The authors offer relevant insights and anecdotes into the experiences and perspectives from diverse university contexts and sites of practice. The editors are thoughtful and erudite in curating the cases well and linking them to useful accompanying commentary and theory. This book is necessary for anyone in academic development and faculties concerned about students being supported in meaningful ways to exercise their agency towards their own success.

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Call for Papers

Journal of Student Affairs in Africa, 2024, JSAA 12(2)

Students and Internationalization in Africa: Key stakeholders, silent voices

Internationalization has become one of the main drivers of change in higher education, including in Africa. While it presents several opportunities, internationalization also poses myriad challenges and even risks to African universities. Recent years have seen a rise in debate on how to make internationalization work for African universities. This is mainly due to the imbalances and asymmetries associated with various activities and practices which tend to favour universities in developed world regions. Students are the main stakeholders in the universities but have not played a key role in the processes and decision making on internationalization activities. Sub-Sahara Africa has one of the fastest growing student enrolments globally and has thus become an emerging frontier for internationalization, especially mobility of students. Internationalization activities – both at home and abroad – have various impacts on students, both on their academic and general life experiences. The impacts and manifestations of internationalization on students thus need more exploration. How can internationalization be more meaningful and responsive to the needs and experiences of students on campus? How can internationalization be more inclusive and at the same time enhance diversity amongst students? How are students involved in decision making and policy/strategy development for internationalization in African universities? These are some of the issues that could be addressed in this issue. The papers could include comparisons across national cases, in-depth single cases and those based on practitioner experiences.

This guest-edited issue of the *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa (JSAA)* is edited and published in association with the *African Network for Internationalization of Education* (ANIE). The issue builds on ANIE's research on the new dynamics and impacts of internationalization on Africa's higher education, this time with a focus on students. The issue will be published in 2024, the year dedicated by the African Union as the Year of Education in Africa and would thus be an important contribution. The proposed JSAA guest-edited issue will source papers primarily from the wide membership of ANIE spread across several African countries. Otherwise affiliated researchers interested in exploring other student issues in internationalization are also welcome to contribute.

The papers for the JSAA guest-edited issue may be theoretical, empirical and case studies or practice-relevant reflective contributions broadly dealing with the students and internationalization in Africa. The following provides a select list of topics within the scope of this JSAA issue:

- Student mobility in Africa
- New trends and dynamics
- Internationalization at home: Opportunities and challenges for African students

- Community engagement through internationalization
- Global citizenship and local relevance
- International offices and international student services
- Students, governance and policy making for internationalization
- Internationalization and employability
- Student politics, representation and internationalization
- Disability, diversity and inclusion
- Equity and social and epistemological access
- Internationalization and decolonization of the curriculum

Submission Process and Important Dates

Submission of full papers to the editors by:	30 April 2024
Response from editors / vetting process to authors:	30 May 2024
Submission of 1st revisions from authors:	1 July 2024
Peer review process:	1 Spetember 2024
Submissions final manuscripts (2nd revisions) from authors:	30 September 2024
Publication of JSAA Vol. 12 Issue 2:	1 December 2024

JSAA uses APA7 referencing style. Please consult the JSAA Authors Guidelines for information about formatting etc.: https://upjournals.up.ac.za/index.php/jsaa/about/submissions

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Thank you to our reviewers and editors

The JSAA Editorial Executive wishes to thank the peer reviewers and editors of Volume 11 of the Journal of Student Affairs in Africa for their time and expertise in evaluating and helping to select and improve the submissions received:

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Submissions

Please register as an author and read the Author Guidelines at https://upjournals.up.ac.za/index.php/jsaa/user/register. Submissions must be made on the online system at https://upjournals.up.ac.za/index.php/jsaa/about/submissions. For information and help, please contact the Journal Manager, Ms Bronwin Sebonka at bronwin.sebonka@up.ac.za. Submissions in response to special calls for papers must also be made directly to the guest editors concerned (see Call for Papers).

The *JSAA* typically has themed issues. However, submissions that fall within the general scope and focus of the Journal can be made at any time and may be published irrespective of the overall theme of the Journal. Particularly encouraged are open-theme manuscripts that address the following:

- Case studies of innovative practices in student affairs in the context of African higher education (e.g. student lifecycle, orientation, residence management, student governance, student counselling).
- High-level reflective practitioner accounts.
- Explorations of the nexus of student affairs theory, policy and practice in the African context and beyond.
- Conceptual discussions of student development, and key enablers and inhibitors of student development in Africa.
- Explorations of authoritative literature, theory and professional trends related to student affairs in Africa.

Please note that different requirements apply:

- **Research articles**: Contributors are encouraged to submit original research-based manuscripts of ca. 5000 words, including all references, notes, tables and figures. Manuscripts should be accompanied by an abstract of approximately 150-200 words and about five keywords. They should be double-spaced and all pages consecutively numbered.
- **Reflective practice articles** (reflective practitioner accounts) on professional campus practice are peer reviewed. They are screened and reviewed according to the same criteria as research articles, albeit with a different emphasis. They do not need to include extensive consideration of recent literature and theory but focus on in-depth description and learnings. They must comply with standard academic convention and scholarly practice. Typical length: 2,500 - 5,000 words. Abstract: 150-200 words plus about five keywords.
- **Book reviews** should be between 800 - 1,000 words. Competent reviews of key student affairs books are published at the discretion of the Editorial Executive.
- **Letters to the editors, comments and critique** of no more than 2,500 words, are also welcome and published at the discretion of the editors.

- **Proposal for the journal's Interviews and Dialogue section and Calls and Notices** must be emailed directly to the journal manager. The publication of calls and notices (for conferences; vacancies etc.) may incur a nominal fee.

Upon acceptance, all abstracts are translated and published in a second African academic language. This is typically French in order to encourage greater engagement between the anglophone and francophone African Student Affairs scholars and practitioners. Authors who prefer translation into any other official African language (e.g. Afrikaans, Arabic, Kiswahili, isiZulu, isiXhosa, Portuguese, Sesotho, Setswana) must provide a translation upon acceptance of the article, with a confirmation from a language scholar that the translation is accurate.

Authors are required to check their submission's compliance with all of the following items, and submissions that do not adhere to these guidelines may be returned to authors.

1. The ethical requirements of social research have been considered and fully complied with.
2. The submission has not been previously published, nor is it before another journal for consideration (or an explanation has been provided in Comments to the Editor).
3. The submission file is in MS Word, OpenOffice, or RTF document file format.
4. The text is double-spaced; uses a 12-point font; employs italics rather than underlining (except with URL addresses); and all illustrations, figures and tables are placed within the text at the appropriate points, rather than at the end.
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The JSAA publishes research articles (peer-reviewed); high-quality ref lective practitioner accounts (peer-reviewed); dialogues/interviews (non-reviewed); and book reviews (non-reviewed). The Journal is committed to assisting emerging scholars and professionals in developing promising manuscripts to the point of publication.

Editorial commentary

☐ Open submissions ☑ Indexed ☐ Peer reviewed

Research articles and professional practitioner accounts

☑ Open submissions ☑ Indexed ☑ Peer reviewed

Campus dialogue/interview section

☑ Open submissions ☑ Indexed ☐ Peer reviewed

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☑ Open submissions ☑ Indexed ☐ Peer reviewed

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